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THE VILLAGES OF THE BIBLE.

THE
VILLAGES OF THE BIBLE:

*DESCRIPTIVE, TRADITIONAL,
AND
MEMORABLE.*

Sabbath Evening Lectures in Brighton.

BY
REV. PAXTON HOOD,
AUTHOR OF "DARK SAYINGS ON A HARP," "THE PEERAGE OF POVERTY,"
"BLIND AMOS," "BYE-PATH MEADOW," ETC., ETC.

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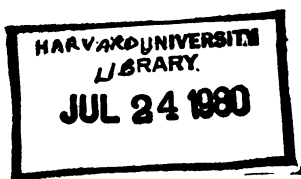
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PREFACE.

THESE Lectures are familiar conversations with my old congregation at Brighton on the Sabbath evenings of the winter of 1872. They are an attempt to realize,—so far as the brief time permitted to a Sabbath evening service, and the superficial character of public speech would permit the realization,—of some of the village scenes of the Holy Land. One of the most luminous works on Sacred Geography is the production of a stay-at-home traveller; I may therefore plead a good example for my temerity in attempting to familiarize the minds of my hearers with scenes I have never witnessed, and it is most probable now, never shall witness,—I scarcely desire to do so! The nineteenth century dispels the illusions of the past; and perhaps I have a better idea of the country of Abraham and Jacob, of David and our Saviour, in the mere exercise of the imagination on the scenes described by the old travellers; than if I loitered along highways, whose romantic solitudes have now vanished before the spirit of the age, and its perpetually-renewed exodus of excursionists.

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE CONGREGATION
WORSHIPPING IN
QUEEN SQUARE CHURCH, BRIGHTON,
WHOSE SERVICES I WAS HONOURED
TO CONDUCT
DURING A PERIOD OF ELEVEN YEARS,
AND IN WHICH THESE LECTURES WERE AMONG MY
LAST WORDS;
AND TO THE MANY AFFECTIONATE MEMORIES
OF THOSE YEARS OF SERVICE,
I INSCRIBE THIS VOLUME.

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THE VILLAGES OF THE BIBLE.

I.

The Bible Aspects of Village Life.

“The villages ceased, they ceased in Israel . . . then was war in the gates.”—JUDGES v. 7, 8.

WE miss something of the fulness and sweetness of the story of old Hebrew days and the old Bible life, especially on its domestic side, if we do not distinctly realize the villages of the Bible. But with which shall we begin? As it is written in Nehemiah, “Let us meet together in some one of the villages.” But which? There are villages on the border-lands between Philistia and Israel, villages on the lake, villages on the cliffs, villages on the river-side, villages on the sea-side, villages among the mountains, villages near to the desert and the wilderness, villages on the great plain of Esdraelon, or Jezreel, villages near to Jerusalem and the great metropolitan towns, villages of great shepherd princes and judges, villages frequented by our Saviour, and villages fre-

quoted by prophets and apostles; such and so various are the villages of the Bible, and as various the Bible aspects of village life. With which shall I begin? Let me begin with some remarks on the Bible aspects of village life in general.

That which formed the burden of the wail of Deborah, may be almost used as a designation and description of our times and our country. The inhabitants of the villages may be said almost to have ceased, the isolation of all communities is broken up, the mighty nerves of science, electricity, and steam, relate together the most insignificant and the most gigantic clusters of population. There is little sympathy felt for village life: it is too pensive, inactive, and inert for the age in which we live. And I shall be charged with indulging in the merely sentimental, perhaps the most morbid, view of life and things, for this attempt to call attention back from the agitation and the strife of the thronged and crowded town to those more gentle, but perhaps not less instructive, associations which meet us in the scantlings of the people.

I know that some difficulty may be apprehended as to what the Bible means by a village, and this is a difficulty which is felt not merely in dealing with the villages of the Bible; it is difficult to say immediately, and at once, where and at what point the village ends and the town begins. We have cities of only a few hundreds of inhabitants, and we have what technically

may be called villages, having neither cathedral nor corporation, neither bishop nor high bailiff, numbering ten or twenty thousand in population. Perhaps the general idea of a village in the Bible was of a cluster of unwall'd huts or houses, without a synagogue ; but we may be sure that in most of such places, although the priest and the building were not there, there was divine service, the knowledge of God, and the calling upon His name. We feel the idea we attach to the term village better than we can accurately or exactly define it : it was a spot where human beings were very few, where society was primitive and unconventional, where nature held an almost absolute sway over the mind and the senses, where pomp and fashion and the coarse concomitants of civilization had not attained a strong pre-eminence, where streets and architectures, huge fanes and fabrics, had not gathered in the swarming crowds of people, where man lived on good terms with nature, so far as it was possible in a world so rough and discordant as this, where not only time but all things are out of joint. Surely I may be permitted to call the age of the Hebrew villages a very beautiful time ; but especially I think it susceptible of proof, that there were circumstances belonging to the Hebrew village which gave to it some pre-eminence and distinction over the villages of many other lands. It will be my purpose to draw forth those lessons, to show that the Bible did not permit its people, even in the smallest communities, to live untu-

4 THE BIBLE ASPECTS OF VILLAGE LIFE.

tored, uninfluenced, and unrelated to the great ends of revelation. These were not the *savage* villages it is so easy to call up to the imagination, and such as those all travellers describe to us who have penetrated into the lone wilderness ; and they were not *feudal* villages like those of Europe from its earliest dawn, where one strong, oppressive tyrant ruled and claimed a property in all that the subject villagers possessed, alike in estate, and body, and mind. And the villages of the Bible are not *commercial* villages ; they did not exist for the mere purposes of barter and trade, merely to aggrandize and enrich one or two, who might do what they would with the product of the soil, altogether heedless of the well-being of the community which administered to their well-being. A religious atmosphere invests the villages of the Bible ; human life everywhere, throughout the smallest institutions of that sacred book, is compelled to look up, is saved from looking down, from regarding life as a hopeless, grinding fate ; the life of the villager is charmed from injustice, oppression, and fraud by Divine principles taking shape in laws and enactments. God revealed Himself manifestly first in villages and to villagers. From the eldest and most ancient time it must have been so : the patriarchs were villagers. By-and-by we shall walk through the villages where they lived, to mark what lessons they preach to us. It would seem that the great thoughts of the great men who from time to time roused the nation, were born in villages ;

and the first notes of the Incarnation sounded over the plain to villagers' ears. These simple folk of the Bible seem to have been the appointed vehicles of Divine communion and communication. Thus there are many Bible aspects of village life of a more than charming and sentimental character.

Far be it from me to assert that the village is all perfect and the city all imperfect. No ; but do we not read it too much the other way ? Everything great, and healthy, and wise in the city ; nothing, or but little, worthy of commendation in the village ! There, we say, man is poor, lowly, ignorant, powerless ; in the large town man is great, enlightened, strong. In the city you seem to be impressed with the monarchy of man, his vast works, his mighty scientific exploits, and man meets you everywhere. There he seems to be the creator, not merely the discoverer. He comes at last almost to believe that the forces of nature which he applies are the creations of his mind not less than the manipulations of his skill. No doubt God has His way in great cities. The way of providence in our own day seems to be right through those immense and dreadful drifts of huge and seething populations. I hope to be expressing no unfriendly or altogether uninstructional word, when I ask you to travel back with me to some thoughts suggested by another state of things. England has been in a very pre-eminent manner the country of villages ; all travellers passing through our land have noticed this as a national

characteristic. They vary exceedingly: there are villages which do not much commend themselves to the eye or to the heart, but generally how sweet is their aspect, how sweetly they seem to repose beneath their ancient spire, their magnificent elm, and oak, and yew-tree shade,—

“ Where daisies blush, and wind-flowers wet with dew,
Where shady lanes with hyacinths are blue,
Where the elm blossoms o’er the brooding bird,
And wild and wide the plover’s wail is heard.” *

Sweet is the rural walk through lanes and grassy fields close-cropped by nibbling sheep. How ample their cultivation, the inheritance not merely of our times but of long ages of domestic prosperity and peace. Did we yield ourselves to the power of that great painter, Crabbe, the English village would indeed seem a disenchanted spot. He delighted rather to paint it as a length of burning sand,—

“ Where the thin harvest waved its withered ears ; ”

a region of rank weeds and thistles stretching their prickly arms. He noted rather the “silky leaf of the slimy mallow,” and the blue bugloss painting the sterile soil. He thought that fields and flocks only indicated the wealth of the grazier and the farmer ; beyond, he only saw the wretchedness of the labourer.

* Ebenezer Elliot—“The Splendid Village.”

There was truth in his pictures, but they were especially coloured from the sad impressions of his own life of early grief and sorrow ; and, sad as human life is in every scene, I think it may be doubted if the sadness of the village ever reaches the deep sadness of the overcrowded town. But what pleasing pictures present themselves—the group of haystacks round the farm,—

“ Where low and still the hamlets lie,
Beneath their little patch of sky,
And little lot of stars.”

The wimpling burn, the sweet winding field-path, the happy bird on the bending tree, the little plot of garden-ground, not unrelieved by flowers, the glories of the hedge, the whitethorn in the spring, the red holly-berry in the winter—there, the objects of nature are not far to seek ; and not only so,—from the village have often come forth answers to the deepest problems of life.

“ Though habitation none appear,
The greenness tells man must be there ;
There toil pursues his daily round,
There pity shows sweet tears, and love,
In woodbine bower or birchen grove,
Inflicts his tender wound.
Who comes not hither ne’er shall know
How beautiful this world below,
When the coarse rushes to the evening breeze
Sigh forth their ancient melodies.”

Wordsworth was a villager, our English Job ; he

was born in a village town, lived all his life in a still more sequestered village; and, indeed, it needs the stillness and the silence of such a world adequately to apprehend and most sacredly to answer the difficult questions which will make themselves heard in the human heart.

But the village, the English village, seems to be losing much of its old peacefulness and calm. Wherever a beautiful village is, it is soon spoilt; stately hotels arise, fashion pours its crowds, and the old peacefulness goes. The resources of the place are developed, long streets of monotonous shops line the way, hurry and noise assault the ear. It is the inevitable law; we must yield to it. But shall we not think of another time: shall we not attempt to cherish some other thoughts? The Bible presents us with them in its glimpses of village life. In the villages of the Bible we have indeed set before us no science of society; but the impression upon my mind, as the villages of the old book rise before me, is something the same as that I have when I pass through the many counties of England. I find there also, in the Bible time, was fostered in the village that intense love of nature. I might say that all the great poets of the book reveal it; and the great poet of any nation is representative of the passions and emotions of the times and the people to whom he sung. But by many hints and expressions casually arising, was revealed that sweet sympathy with nature—that sub-

jection, of the spirit beneath her wonderful majesties and her pensive beauties. How it is revealed when almost any of the villagers speak, not less than when poet or prophet strike their more inflamed and passionate chords! Innumerable expressions occur in the Book of Judges, in the beautiful remonstrances of Abigail, in the words of the wise woman of Tekoa, in many tender expressions in the Minor Prophets. The Bible is full of words and allusions which almost lose their significance now to ordinary readers, because there is so little residence near to those retired scenes which gave to them their origin; and hence those who are still permitted to live amidst scenes which, perhaps, to some seem monotonous, may find a pleasure in being directed to the beauties of their own abode; and those whose residence is not there, may yet feel it an enjoyment, even as it is pleasant to the inhabitants of the town to escape and breathe the fresh air of country life and country things.

For indeed the Holy Land was made up of village impressions. Group them together, almost all the tender and touching imagery of the Bible is derived from village scenery; from "the rose of Sharon;" from "the lily of the valley;" from "the voice of the turtle heard in the land;" from vineyards which trailed precious grapes; from the clustering date and pomegranate; from "the dew which lay thick on Hermon;" from the "balm in Gilead;" from "the cattle on a thousand hills;" from "the excellency

of Carmel ;" from the "scent of Lebanon ;" from "the early and the latter rain ;" from "valleys covered over with flocks," and "little hills rejoicing on every side ;" from "the birds which sang among the branches ;" from "the ploughman who overtook the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that sowed the seed ;" from "barns which were filled with plenty, and presses which burst out with new wine ;" from "precious things brought forth by the sun, and precious things brought forth by the moon ;" from "clouds which dropped fatness ;" from the waving fir and the blossoming olive and the gentle myrtle-tree : even the stern mountain-pass yielded its lesson, where the "valley" and village "of Achor was a door of hope." All the most sublime and beautiful imagery of the Hebrew Scriptures clusters round the scenery of village life ; the land was full of pictures, upon which faith was invited to meditate. Shall we in these later days renounce these lessons ? or rather shall we not find that they still have a perennial freshness, and turn them to account as giving to us some aspects of village life ?

I have said, in the science of society villages occupy a considerable space in the speculations and doctrines of modern political economists and historians. The villages of the Bible scarcely present themselves before us, it may be thought, for the same illustrations : but do they not furnish their own teachings even here ? Our age is full of precedent ; and

the men who are interested in the history of society, are fond of referring back to times when the village furnished those principles, in its small and narrow dimensions, which are being now applied to the government of large communities.* It is not my intention to dwell at any length on the system of political economy disclosed in the Bible ; there was such a system, and it might be studied to much advantage. But while writers on economical and political science are travelling back anxiously, searching for these precedents and principles to which I have referred, finding from them how society grew, how men emerged from barbarism, what were the prescriptions and laws which fenced round persons and property before the burgh or borough, before the city, before the great far-spreading town, before any of these existed, is it not interesting to us to turn to the Bible, and find a system of society there which recognised the rights of the meanest, the weakest, and the smallest ? We have more certain information about the constitution of the old Hebrew villages, than we have of many belonging to much more modern nations. And if it be interesting to a political economist like Maine to explore the general relations of a far-off Hindoo village ; or for M. Guizot, in his noble

* See this especially in "Village Communities in the East and West. Six lectures delivered at Oxford." By Henry Sumner Maine. And in "Historical Essays in Connection with the Land, Church," etc. By E. William Robertson.

lectures on the civilization of Europe, to deal at length with the state and character of villages, and their place in the great European system, when feudalism was consolidating its powers in Europe—shall the political and religious life of the village of the Bible be less interesting to us? Indeed, the study of what must have been the village system of the Bible, brings forth distinctions which tend to show in how much higher regard man as man was held in the Hebrew commonwealth, as compared with other societies.

The village system of mediæval society in Europe is found in old Indian and Sanscrit villages; there, ages before the peopling of Europe, seems to have existed the mark, or march, of the township, of the waste, and of the arable or cultivated area. But as the village community settled itself in Europe, however, we are able to see in it an era in the history of society. What a picture it presents! In such a village, five or six individuals are to be seen in a sphere superior to and estranged from all the rest of the society around them; this was the feudal family. There was the castle, with its population of colonists and serfs; the feudal lord, with his individual haughtiness and prodigious pride. "What insolence," says Guizot, "must have arisen in his soul! above him no superior, no equal near him." Possibly some moral relations, some habits of affection, might grow up between the lord and the serf; but these were not

essential, they did not exist by reason of the relation, but in spite of it. Now, in the Bible there was the announcement of another principle; the theocracy guarded the rights of the lowest, and if they were not maintained, it was in contravention of the spirit of the law, and it received the condemnation of the law.

I repeat again, how interesting are the historical aspects of villages, and how intently is the eye of searching analysis bent on the endeavour to find in them precedents for many of the ways and usages of modern society!

Again, it ought to be no less interesting to us to trace back to villages our venerable traditions, the earliest development and growth of that singular spiritual society called the Church; how they became the centres of light and power to surrounding neighbourhoods; how in villages throughout Israel the earliest and noblest lessons of righteousness, justice, and holiness were given to the world; how throughout those scattered tribes provision was made for the service of God; how in lone retreats the flames of sacred genius were fostered; how attention was given to the rights of the poor, so that throughout those farmsteads and fields and vineyards the condition of suffering was to be ameliorated, "the poor also, and him that had no helper." Fancy and imagination might exercise their power, and carry us farther back; but I should only use a poet's licence if I were to

attempt to describe antediluvian villages—the villages of the world before the flood. Popular traditions indeed abound of such. Cities there were,—large concourses of people ; villages also innumerable there must have been. Poets have attempted in pleasing strains to describe them. I shall not follow in their track of description ; but well may we believe that it was in such retreats the first arts of the world were discovered and applied ; that in some such old-world village, fire and iron gave up their secrets, and the blessing and benevolence of the cultivation of the soil caused the infant society to sing for joy. In some such village, no doubt, Jubal strung the first harp—father of those masters of melody who have so often cheered the world's heart since. And where can we suppose that Enoch walked with God ? Surely it is a pleasant and very allowable exercise of the fancy to conceive of him in those days—days probably of human brute force, for we read, “ there were giants in the earth in those days,” men probably even Titanic in structure, as we know they were Titanic in crime. Far from their society to peaceful solitudes Enoch removed : prophet, poet, and saint, amidst the shades of the young world's eldest trees he nursed his holiness in secret places, and from thence, in some way to us inconceivable, he was suddenly translated —“ he was not, for God took him.” What such villages were, I shall not attempt either to conceive or to describe, favourite as the theme is. Mont-

gomery, Heraud, Jean Ingelow, Longfellow, and many others have set themselves to the task ; this only we may believe, that it was in cities such as they were then, such as tradition has painted them, fraud and violence accumulated ; and it is by a sort of reasoning of divine analogy we may gather, in the small village community the few held their lives in purity and peace, cultivated the life of divine revelations, which we are assured even then blessed the world, discovered and applied the earliest lights of useful study and invention, which were gathered up in the ark and transmitted to illuminate other generations when the judgment of the flood had retired and its terrors had passed away. Only, perhaps, it may be noticed that there seems always as if something of judgment gathered in over-crowded cities : as it was in that old world, so it has been repeatedly since,—massive communities have been dangerous ; like the massing together of huge clouds, they hold portents and lightnings ; through them society in every age seems to have reached its climax of selfishness ; and through them has come the storm which has rent and scattered, and compelled reconstruction. The age of disseminated villages has not always been the age of safety ; but the age of great cities is invariably an age of great danger.

Ours has been called the age of great cities ; certainly it is so. There have been great cities before but never so influential as now, never so strong. It

seems as if all other interests were lost, villages lost sight of, and the tremendous populations in heaps of hundreds of thousands rule the world. Magnificent streets take the place of the long colonnades of trees ; the long line of rail has superseded the stream ; the stately square supersedes the field-path ; the crush of populations heaped and crowded together has taken the place of the scanty and scattered cottages and the charming lanes. But with this has grown up another feature, and men hurry away now to look at the country as they never did before, to catch the breath of the downs, and moors, and forests ; to catch the music and the murmur of the stream, and the wave of woods, and the sight of meadows ; for there is that in man's nature to which these bring refreshment and harmony. Man's lower nature is sustained most in the city ; his higher is sustained most in the country. So I have thought we may spend time profitably in learning a few of the lessons which God has taught to man from village life. How sweet are those verses in the Song of Solomon*—"Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field ; let us lodge in the villages, let us get up early to the vineyards ; let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth : there will I give thee my loves." We have heard so much said about cities, that we can well afford to say and hear some words

* Solomon's Song, vii. 11, 12.

about villages. Cities have come to be regarded as the very normal, almost the ideal, state of man. No man reckons he is doing well unless he is driving a large trade in the high-street of a city. The villages are like rivers or rivulets; great towns and cities are like the seas or oceans into which all the rivulets at last pour and empty themselves. If there is any talent in the village, it is sure to seek for employment in the city. The citizen takes pride in his name: how much more lofty it sounds than the word villager! He looks down upon his neighbour in the small hamlet, and boasts of his *urban* manners, his *civility*—terms which signify city manners. He sneers at *rustic* life, at *rustic* speech, and *rustic* manners; one would suppose that cities gave the divinest idea; that villages occupied an inferior place in the Divine arrangements. Some texts seem to point to it as a calamity that “the inhabitants of the villages ceased.” And it is a great calamity when the villages cease, when the little farm has to be absorbed in the park, and the common is stolen from the poor, and the ground is so valued that the poor man cannot have his piece of garden. It is a great calamity when such is the case; and no doubt it arises greatly from the fact that our owners of property have not fulfilled their duties to their property. The stately proprietor of the village has left it to dwell for the most part of his time in the metropolis. He has taken his rents, but he has shown little interest in his neighbourhood; he has not

sought to improve and elevate the tone of his village society ; he has acted upon the idea of exacting to the utmost his rights, and fulfilling the minimum of his duties ; as if he had a right to obtain his rents anyhow, and to spend them anywhere. Men cannot neglect their duties with impunity, and this neglect is bearing bitter fruit. The villagers have been too usually regarded as serfs ; indeed, once the term *villain* and villager were synonymous. And just as the French word *paysan* is synonymous with the old Latin word *paganus*, the term implying a villager, a pagan, so words change their meanings and relations. The original Greek word from which this is derived, implied a fountain and the rural neighbourhood of the fountain ; this again, in Latin, became the designation for villagers and the village life. But when Christianity prevailed over the Roman world, taking possession of the cities and the great centres of life, it became the designation of idolaters, because idolatry itself had retreated and was languishing in obscure villages.* But it has come about that our cities form too often an unnatural heaping together of human beings, often without any regard to morality or health, frequently without the possibility of health. Thus in too many instances have been generated new diseases, loathsome

* For a very interesting analysis of the word *pagan*, and its relation to the French *pays*, the English *peasant*, *page* as an attendant, and the *page* of a book, see a note to Böhm's edition of Gibbon, vol. ii., pp. 461, 462.

fevers. Life is too fast, too exciting; the pulse beats often at fever heat; life is near to madness; men crowd together, but they do not know each other, and do not much care for each other. We have populations of one hundred thousand, two, three, four hundred thousand—in London, of millions: it is unnatural. I have myself conversed with men in London who never saw a blade of grass growing, never saw a green field. They scarcely ever see the sun; he is always obscured by mists and clouds, or he only glares on the hot pavements of crowded alleys and courts, or perpetual smoke hangs over the whole neighbourhood. Man sees too much of man, and too little of the works of God; his very rent frightens him, and sometimes drives him to distraction. There is scarcely any alternative between knavery and the workhouse. I would we could all come nearer to the village life—in this as in many other things: would we could reach the golden mean,—neither too isolated nor too crowded!

Let us turn then to the villages; let us seek and make opportunities for loneliness and self-communion; cities afford few such, but here we may find the loophole of retreat, from whence we may see the stir of the great Babel, and not feel the crowd, although we hear the roar:—

“Meditation here

May think down hours to moments; here the heart

May give a useful lesson to the head,

And learning wiser grow without his books.”

The villages of the Bible do plainly illustrate this lesson, that national wealth is not in the Divine conception the chief end and purpose of any nation: to increase national representative value, this is the chief enterprise of modern times. "He added so much to the national wealth!" What of that?—was he happy, holy, and good? Especially is this the case with England; the man is pushed aside, the country grows in wealth; the overplus of toil, of labour, is more than the demand for life from toil; life and all its aims are lost in the effort to put by. We have constructed a fiction, a fanciful ideal from our science of political economy, and before it all justice and righteousness go down. The village is scarcely compatible with this great absorbing system of the age. Thus, that the nation may grow to its Titanic proportions, the cities grow and the millions groan. The Holy Land was little more than an assemblage of villages; but from them goes forth the lesson to States and nations, and statesmen and kings. And is it not true that the text realizes itself in a great measure in our day? "The inhabitants of the villages ceased." The small populations were scattered or absorbed in the cities, "they chose new gods, there was war at the gates." The tendency of modern times has been to break up all small holdings, to absorb and monopolise them into large concerns; small farms absorbed in large, small businesses in large; and communism and the

panic of strikes are very much the result of this. The injustice of capital has created the injustice of labour; there is "war at the gates" because the villages, the small holdings, have ceased. And if we could go to the towns and great cities of the Bible, and mark and learn and inwardly digest, we should find in the denunciations and judgments pronounced on Egypt, and Tyre, and Babylon, the lessons God would have us learn, and learn what indeed we do well know, how great is the difference between a so-called wealthy and a happy land.

I shall take some of the most remarkable villages of the Bible, and attempt to set them forth, with their characters and events and lessons: for God cares for villages; the statesman thinks of cities, those great seats of almost unweldable and unwieldable power. In this text we read how Deborah was raised up to be the saviour of villages; they were accounted little of, they were oppressed by taxation, and in this extremity God raised up a woman to redeem the land. God cares for villages. Cleverly laid Haman his designs to root out the Jews from the land, and he aimed at the villages.* But God interposed, and through the villages the Jews were saved. God cares for villages. Into the villages Christ sent His disciples. Into the village He went Himself. As we read, "He went through the cities and villages teach-

* *Esther* iii. 8.

ing in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, as He journeyed towards Jerusalem.”* It was thus that He put together the highways and the hedges, the places of bustling resort and those of lonely and unfrequented isolation. So God seizes on the scattered inhabitants of life. Others have sought the city, He sought the hermitage; and this we may see more distinctly when we come, in the course of these pages, to that in which I shall show how a village was God’s metropolis. It has often been alleged as against Christianity, that the universe is so infinite, that it is inconceivable that God can have condescended to notice a world so small and interests so insignificant as ours. But this is the fact, the teaching of the Lord, that “He left the ninety and nine,” and came to seek the one stray solitary wanderer, and to compel it back to the flock and the fold. In some such way I would use these conferences to show our Almighty Father’s interests in little places, in unknown people, and how they also are hung upon His infinite purpose of Almighty intention and design.

* Matt. ix. 35 ; Mark vi. 56 ; Luke xiii. 22.

II.

The Village of the Ark.

“And the ark rested upon the mountains of Ararat. And Noah went forth out of the ark ; and Noah builded an altar unto the Lord.”
—GEN. viii. 4, 18, 19, 20.

SO the mysterious vessel ceased from its hard labouring and voyage over that most dreadful sea. If exception be taken to the idea of a village of the ark, it seems beyond all doubt on the slopes of Ararat such a village there was ; and from our point of view what village more full of wonder, so dreadfully, so beautifully real ! Here, then, on the slopes of this transcendently glorious mountain, was the second cradle of the race—the birthplace of the world’s second fathers. Eden escapes identity, the surmises of scholars are dim and unsubstantial ; but a large amount of consentaneous evidence seems to point to Ararat as the place whence, like mighty rivers rolling from the varied sides of some great mountain, the various ancestors of our present human family pursued their way. How strange their first experiences, as they stepped forth upon that weird

and awful solitude! Who can conceive it? Whatever the beauty and brightness of the sky, and however fair the promise smiling over the face of the whole earth, it must have seemed like a very tomb,—a vast and dreadful churchyard. How solitary must they have felt as they pitched their first rude huts beneath the shadow of the ark; glad, we must believe, to escape even from its securing enclosures, and so to rear their first village in a world of unseen graves.

The village of the ark. The whole earth is full of the memorials of which this resting is the closing event and scene. I know it seems very difficult to believe, and yet the evidence is of a most cumulative character; and before you reject the fact as incredible, I think I would advise you to make yourself familiar with the summaries of testimony amounting even to demonstration. I know that the strange handwriting of nature upon the hills, the cliff, and the comb, and the mysterious crushing together of all kinds of fossil bones, in such places as Kitt's cave, the Kirkdale cave, or Lyme Regis, and other such spots, can scarcely be allowed to stand in evidence; but there is evidence most strange and convincing of another kind. A great amount of evidence is grouped together by Mr. Catcott,* and the yet more recent and scholarly grouping in Mr. Vernon Harcourt's "*Doc-*

* "*A Treatise on the Deluge,*" etc., etc. By A. Catcott, Lecturer of St. John's, in the city of Bristol. 1761.

trine of the Deluge ;”* the world is covered with memories and monuments of the reality of the doctrine of the flood. The story of Ovid in the “*Metamorphoses*” is, with some differences, almost the repetition of the sacred story :—

“ A mountain of stupendous height there stands,
 Betwixt the Athenian and Bœotian lands,
 Parnassus is its name ; whose forky rise
 Mounts thro’ the clouds, and mates the lofty skies.
 High on the summit of this dubious cliff,
 Deucalion wafting, moor’d his little skiff.
 He with his wife were only left behind
 Of perished man ; they two were human kind.
 The mountain nymphs and Themis they adore,
 And from her oracles relief implore.
 The most upright of mortal man was he,
 The most sincere and holy woman, she.
 When Jupiter, surveying earth from high
 Beheld it in a lake of water lie ;
 That where so many millions lately lived,
 But two, the best of either sex, survived ;
 He loosed the northern wind ; fierce Boreas flies
 To puff away the clouds and purge the skies :
 Serenely, while he blows, the vapours driven,
 Discover heaven to earth, and earth to heaven.”†

But the story of Deucalion is still more literal and exact to the narrative of Genesis in the well-known words so often quoted from Lucian. “Many say that this temple,—that at Hierapolis in Syria,—was built by

* “The Doctrine of the Deluge,” etc. By the Rev. L. Vernon Harcourt. 1838.

† Dryden’s translation.

Deucalion, the Scythian. That Deucalion, I mean, in whose time the greatest inundation of waters was. I have heard in Greece, what the Grecians say concerning this Deucalion. The story they relate is as follows: 'The present race of men was not the first, for they totally perished; but is of a second generation, which, being descended from Deucalion, increased to a great multitude. Now of these former men they relate this story: they were insolent, and addicted to unjust actions; for they neither kept their oaths, nor were hospitable to strangers, nor gave ear to suppliants; for which reason this great calamity befell them: on a sudden the earth poured forth a vast quantity of water, great showers fell, the rivers overflowed, and the sea arose to a prodigious height; so that all things became water, and all men were destroyed; only Deucalion was left unto a second generation, on account of his prudence and piety. He was saved in this manner: he went into a large ark or chest which he had, together with his sons and their wives; and when he was in, there entered swine, and horses, and lions, and serpents, and all other creatures which live on earth, by pairs. He received them all, and they did him no hurt: for the gods created a great friendship among them, so that they sailed all in one chest while the water prevailed.' These things the Greeks relate of Deucalion." But perhaps the oldest and most wonderful verification of the doctrine of the Deluge, as announced

in the Book of Genesis, has been published within the last few days, in the translation by Mr. George Smith from an old Assyrian tablet in the British Museum. In the presence of this most remarkable document all such attempts as Mr. Cox's in his "Mythology of the Aryan Nations" melt away as the trifling imperinences of scepticism; it is as if "the stones cried out." The document is of surpassing and marvellous interest.* But indeed, travel which way we will, we meet the tradition; we should expect it of course in Josephus, but how extraordinary the account in Berosus, the tradition of the Babylonians and the Assyrians given by Abyseus. The legend exists in a singular form in Persia; still more remarkable in China, whose Fohi seems to have been Noah, for he, the first king, is said to have had no father, he was the first man of the post-diluvial world, all his ancestors are said to have perished in a flood. He was conceived by his mother encompassed with a rainbow. Fohi bred seven kinds of creatures, which he used to sacrifice to the supreme spirit of heaven and earth. Finally, Fohi signifies a sacrifice, and Noah obtained his name from the same circumstance; and the place where Fohi rested, the north-west province of China, is near to that Ararat where the ark rested. America has a crowd of traditions—the Iroquois have theirs, the Cubans theirs, the people of Terra Firma, Peru,

* For the best account of this discovery, see two columns and a half of the *Daily News*, December 5, 1872.

and Mexico have theirs. Again, Peleg, in whose days the earth is said to have been divided, has his name from a word which in Hebrew signifies a river ; while the same hint meets us in the famous Greek word *Pelagos*. Such are specimens of the legends strewn over the whole earth.

As to the event itself, of course it is so stupendous that it is quite inexplicable. We read, "The fountains of the great deep were broken up." But let us adore that Almighty power which holds always the "balances of the clouds." We are astounded at the mere record of the Deluge. Have we never been astonished that the Deluge does not repeat itself? That it does not is owing to the sublime cause, wonderfully expressed in the language of Job,—“He maketh small the drops of waters, they pour down rain according to the vapour thereof;” and again, “He hath spread out the sky, which is strong, and is as a molten looking-glass.” Now it is certain these words represent a law which has only to be suspended, and instantly the fountains of the heavens are broken up ; and God can do this.

For we are to believe that the very majesty of hell had usurped the dominion of earth. Satan had entire lordship, and all men had their fealty and discipleship to him, and the world was as—

“A wreck, as of a noble ship long tost,
Sublime though desolate, and beautiful
Though loveless ; for her sails the winds about

Woo idly, and play round her keel the waves,
Recoiling as in wonder evermore.
Of her the mariner shall fable how,
When withered by the seasons utterly,
She yet at night walks o'er the waters wide,
With all her bravery flaunting to the stars,
Weft of the wave, the spectre of a ship ;
And on her deck the spirits of a crew,
While haunted ocean in the ghastly gleams
Of the pale moon, looks ghostly and aghast."*

And so over the dreary sea that wonderful vessel pursued its miraculous way, all sky above, dark, starless sky ; all sea around, dark, dreary, but unburdened sea—unburdened save by the dead bodies of floating creatures drifting hither and thither ; no other vessel, no meeting of ships, no fleet of boats, no sight of cape or bay. So solitarily the vessel pursued its course amidst the rain ! the rain ! the rain ! What a voyage ! And the villages were covered, and the cities and all their works were covered ; and the trees were rent and torn by the sweeping of the blast. And still there they floated by, corpse succeeding corpse ; and there rose the scream and the cry ; and still the ark, the mysterious ship, holds on its way. And the rocks were overthrown, and the thick forests bowed before the flood, and the nests of the high birds were sucked into the torrent, and the birds themselves vainly beat about upon ineffectual wings, and gave up the contest, sinking down and floating dead upon the awful waters.

* Heraud's noble but mystical poem, "The Judgment of the Flood."

And still the mysterious ship held on its way, for the "fountains of the great deep were broken up," and the rain continued falling, falling, falling; and the tops of the highest mountains were covered; and one great sea wrapped the earth as a vesture, or over-canopied it as a pall.

I am aware that Dr. Pye Smith and some other distinguished scholars have doubted the universality of the Deluge; whether it included the whole of the round world or not, the whole round world has a legend of such a dread event. I need not refer more at length to this matter than to say, it seems quite unphilosophical to maintain the possibility of such a partial flood; this seems to me even more astonishing than the universal. Of course a miracle again introduced might have chained the devouring waters and held them to one section of the globe. But conceive the tops of the highest mountain, Ararat, covered, the waters rolling fifteen cubits over the highest peak: how then would it be possible, save by an omnipotent fiat, to bind and to restrict those waves? We may see a little of the probable moral cause of the Deluge; the antediluvian ages are described as full of violence; everything seems to have been on a gigantic scale, creatures such as we have no knowledge of now, excepting by their fossils, ranged the forests, swam the floods, and lay lythe and horrible on the sands. We cannot resist the impression that the humanity of those ages was kindred to the awful animal life

and existence ; the traditions which perpetuate the story of the Deluge, recite also the enormous wickedness of mankind. We know well that Providence has blotted out from existence races of creatures. The gigantic wings of the pterodactyle do not darken our heavens now ; no fear have we of the lumbering hugeness of the megatherium or the mammoth ; and cruel as looks the crocodile, the banks of our rivers are not infested by iguanodon, or ichthyosaurus, or any of those huge saurian reptiles ; we have still some dreadful creatures left, but these assuredly have been swept away. Is it unreasonable to suppose that some such creatures existed in the human race ? Is not this obviously the intention of that Scripture which tells us "there were giants in the earth in those days," and that the flood was the great catastrophe which removed them, while it preserved mankind ? Is this not very obviously the teaching, when we are told how God looked down and saw how in his violence man had corrupted his way, the earth full of mammoth-like strength, saurian-like craft ? So, to save the covenant, God poured forth the amazing judgment. I think we may even be sure that probably another generation and the whole race would have been wrecked, with no Noah as a righteous preacher to condemn the world by his example.*

* This is the idea wrought out in James Montgomery's poem of tranquil and pensive beauty, "The World before the Flood," in which the translation of Enoch is his salvation from the giant king :—

And so the ship held on its mysterious voyage. Mysterious lights shone in the innermost hold of the vessel. It is quite astonishing what singular traditions gather round that voyage, and seem to linger in that ark. Truly we may well wonder at many things; how life was sustained at all through the dreadful monotony of that voyage! And think of the darkness! And what was the window Noah was ordered to make? What singular stories the Rabbis tell of the holy jewel which shone within when there was no light of sun, or moon, or stars; and how this indeed was the window ordained by God, the precious stone shining like a kindled lamp, a spirit of marvellous and ineffable power. This, say they, was the *Zohar* within the ark, this was the window ordained and ordered by God. Well, of this we cannot know; but we know of Noah, he had the covenant promise of God. And so the ship held on its mysterious way.

At last it rested on the mountain of Ararat. Ararat is synonymous with Armenia, where it stands, so it is used in Scripture.* My object is not especially to show that the ark must have rested there; there are some difficulties of tradition; still I take those valleys to have been the seat of The First Village. Stepping

"The giants leapt upon the prophet,—'Die!'

Headlong and blind with rage they search around,
But Enoch walked with God and was not found."

* 1 Kings xix. 37; Isaiah xxxvii. 38; Jeremiah li. 27.

forth from the ark, the patriarchs wound their way down the sides of the hill, leaving it there like a sacramental temple, to be mysteriously embedded in the ice torrents, the swift concealing glacial waters. We may depend upon it they hastened to find another abode. However benevolently and safely that ark had borne them on, we may be very sure they were in haste to leave it ; its very sanctity would surround it with a very awful spell of terror, like a spectre-haunted church at night ; so to some less awful spot, in the presence of associations more human and hopeful, I think they would hasten to rear their first village. But around that mountain the tradition has hung ever since. To this day it is called by those who live at its base or on its slopes, Koh Nur, the mountain of Noah ; and it has another name, the mountain of the eight ; and interesting dreams of the cradles of the early peoples gather round this spot. Wherever it was, that village of the ark, it was the earliest home of the present race. But Ararat looks like the magnificent boundary of nations. "Nothing," says a traveller, "is more beautiful than its shape, more awful than its height ; surrounding mountains sink into insignificance when compared with it, so perfect in all its parts." One of the sublimest objects in nature, some think it earth's sublimest mountain, sublime rivers leaping from its breast and rolling round it, and seeming to point the finger to the migratory and nomadic tribes. So silent and wonderful it stands

its brow glittering with a crown of snow, a mountain said to be as sacred and inaccessible as magnificent. There, at its base—there, beneath that celebrated eminence, that so-called holy mountain, the first small village of the post-diluvian world arose.

[I.] *It was the village of the ark.* A building fashioned and fabricated from the forests of a drowned and buried world. Surely we have said, What a sacred structure! What were the ships of Jason, or those enumerated by Homer, compared with this? And what were the voyages of the famous ship of Drake, *The Golden Hinde*, or the conflicts of the old *Téméraire*, or the *Victory* compared with this? Why, as it rested on the mountain there, it must have hung like a sacramental sign; and indeed there ever has been something sacramental about the ark. The Hebrew was a singular language: I know we may be very fantastical with it, and etymology has sometimes been applied to most fantastical uses; but this word translated ark, *thebah*, a triliteral word, reads one way a house, the other way the sanctuary, and it was this, a house and a sanctuary, a holy refuge, a sacramental ordinance of grace.* It has been remarked often, there is a strange and sacramental power and significance in Hebrew letters: the name Abram is changed

* See a very interesting essay "On the name Thebah, why given by God to the Ark," in ΑΠΟΔΕΙΞΕΙΣ ΔΙΔΑΚΤΙΚΑΙ, Theological, Mathematical, and Physical: By Francis Lee, M.D. Published by Alexander Strahan, at the Golden Ball, Cornhill, 1752.

into Abraham by the single letter H. It is the same letter which gives this distinctive character or designation to the ark ; and they both point, ark and man, to the same great lesson. They both say, "In thee and in thy children shall all the families of the earth be blessed." Ark and man seem to be a predestinated provision and prevision that the race should not be lost. And in fact this is grace, this is predestination, the assurance that the race shall not be lost, nor God's end defeated ; to this end the ark was the vehicle, a vessel of salvation, like a church floating over and amidst the wild billows, seeming to say as it floated along, "Neither is there salvation in any other."

Tradition says Noah was a priest within the ark, which is indeed very likely ; within its solemn sacred confines arose from his lips the hallowed morning and evening sacrifice of prayer and praise. It is not possible to conceive in such circumstances that a life of prayer was wanting ; indeed, tradition—with what propriety of course we can scarcely tell—has preserved the prayer of Noah ; and the learned John Gregory gives it to us as he gathered it from the Arabic and Syriac. And assuredly the prayer is a beautiful one, a prayer which might not only have been well offered up in that floating church, but which may be even a pattern for many prayers. The following is John Gregory's translation from the floating words of the traditional original : "O Lord, excellent art Thou in Thy truth, and there is nothing great in comparison

of Thee. Look upon us with the eye of mercy and compassion, deliver us from this deluge of waters, and set our feet in a large room. By the sorrows of Adam Thy first-made man, by the blood of Abel Thy holy one, by the righteousness of Seth in whom Thou art well pleased, number us not among those who have transgressed Thy statutes, but take us into Thy merciful care; for Thou art our deliverer, and Thine is the praise from all the works of Thy hands for evermore. And the sons of Noah said, Amen, Lord."*

So that the ark would seem to the world's first fathers a singularly hallowed and venerable form. High over their heads would rise, like a memorial church, the sacred ark; truly like a grand cathedral, surviving the shocks of revolution, standing serene and still while the billowy populations rolled along. And just as within the sacred recesses of the church reared in the dark ages, and surviving down through the latest times, trembles starlight and moonlight, folding in their mystic fingers the columns of nave and choir; so within it,—the mystic church on the heights of the icy hill,—shone through its crevices and window the reflections of the lights of heaven, how much more reflecting, to those who dwelt in the vales below, the time when, through the solitude of

* The works of the reverend and learned Mr. John Gregorie, M.A., of Christ Church, Oxon., 1684.

the melancholy waste of waves it held on its altogether mysterious way, without magnet, or chart, or pilot, or captain, only mysteriously driven forward by Him who "held the winds in His fist," only guarded by Him who held "the waters in the hollow of His hand."

[II.] *The village of the ark was the village of sacrifice.* So soon as they stepped from the ark this appears to have been the first act, to build an altar. The erection of an altar always implies fear, it always speaks the need of expiation; and a wonderful fear must have oppressed these early people. This greatly marks the distinction between religion and religion. Some sentiments are so graceful; they rise into such fair harmonious proportions; they bear witness to elegance, not to suffering; they testify to self-complacency, not to remorse; there is no recoil of feeling, it is the cold acknowledgment of Deity alone, as of one who should say, "I can do with Thee or without Thee." It is the acknowledgment of the intellect of the universe; and it may almost be regarded as God conceived without a moral nature, to whom the holy and the unholy, the pure and the impure, are alike; and such being the case, of course there is no sacrifice, as there is no sense of sin and no necessity for propitiation. Such a state of feeling seems to constitute an insult to God, if the revelation of Him as a being of character be the correct one. This constitutes Deism—a religion without discriminations. There

can be no items of belief, and what necessity for the publication of commandments? All is one, and the one runs indiscriminately through all. If nothing is wrong, why look for propitiation? what need of expiation? Remorse and sorrow for sin are low spirits and nothing more.

Not so would they reason who had seen a world entombed on account of sin, who had seen beneath the waters of the flood the race of the giants swept away, the millions of the earth entombed because of the violence which they had spread through all its borders. So there rose, from the earliest valley to which they descended, the sacrificial flame, seeming to exclaim, "Oh, Holy Innocence, help us! Oh, Holy Purity, pray for us! To Thee, to Thee alone," the prayer seemed to sob and say. Then surely to their minds arose a very vivid sense of the world's Redeemer. Surely a sense of the exceeding greatness and holiness of God filled their spirits,—a sense that they belonged also to the race which for its guiltiness was now covered by the waters of the flood. It is understood that the tradition of the world's Redeemer lingered and lived on through the antediluvian ages from generation to generation, dimly apprehended by sense, assuredly clear to the eye and heart of faith. So amidst their solitude—and their solitude must have been very great and dreadful—would come thoughts and assurances of redemption, not unlike the voices which

echoed after the first parents as they pursued their way across the wilderness followed by the gleams from the guardian seraphs ; so this sacrificial altar in which fear reared the stones, tradition furnished the sacrifice, and faith kindled the flame—this earliest fact in the history of the young race seems to ally them with the records of the past and with the bright hopes of the future.

[III.] Was it as the smoke of the sacrifice was ascending, while they were gathering round the altar, that they looked up and beheld the heaven's arched by the fair mystery of many colours ? Certain it is that *this first village was the village of the rainbow*. Was it *the first* rainbow ?

It is an ancient remark of Hebrew doctors, that when God gives a law He gives also a sign with it ; the sign to Noah was that of the rainbow, as in future years, when the law was given to the Children of Israel, there was also the sign of the Sabbath : "Speak unto the Children of Israel, saying, Verily my Sabbaths ye shall keep, for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations." There can be no Church without its sign. Rainbow and Sabbath might have both existed before, but they were now drawn into a scheme of natural and sacred symbolism ; indeed, they are both external and non-natural symbols, as circumcision and the Lord's Supper are internal.

"The Lord smelled a sweet savour." So swiftly

life bloomed over the graves of men. How soon the mourning earth looks bright again! Visit the fields where, a few years since, was held the carnival of Death, and where he reaped the vintage of the grave. Ah! it is horrible to think, thickly waves the yellow harvest field, fair spread the laughing valleys, the copse, the orchard, the plantation, and yet a hundred thousand bodies lie below. When the fair fingers of spring come and bind up the thick waters of the clouds, and spread abroad those which would have fallen in snows in the gorgeous glories of the heavenly places, how the white pall is swept from the place of graves, and the grasses and the flowers spring all heedless in the kirkyard of the numbers who slumber below! It was so with the village of the ark. How soon the green shines out after the rain and the storm-cloud,—the virgin green over earth's dismantled meadows, the magnificent green over earth's tall and stately trees; and over all this rose the bridge of glory, the mystic and many-coloured arch, which must at all times have seemed a great mystery, which must have seemed an eminently beautiful mystery now. "Behold, I do set my bow in the cloud." Surely it is the most wonderful and beautiful and sublime of all the objects of the natural world. It says nothing either against it or this wonderful introduction of it, that science explains it; its grandeur is not lessened in the heavens because we have seen it arching the torrent or the waterfall; it says nothing

against it as a sign introduced here and now, that probably it had been seen before in the old world ; it had been seen, but not as a sign ; and as it is ever the mark of the thin rain-cloud, the sheen falling upon the spray, which could not be when the blackest glooms of cloud had veiled the sun, so it would seem to say, Look up and see my mercy, my covenant in creation. I suppose we can conceive how there might have been no rain in the ancient world. I know that ordinarily it must appear, that our system of nature is invariable ; I do not see this ; yet I can believe the rainbow might have stood over the villages of the antediluvian world, and still I can regard it as God's marvellous sign of mercy for ever shining over nature, and ever gathering up its brightest significance into the kingdom of grace, so that in the most glorious of the scenes of the inheritance of the saints in light, a rainbow is beheld "round about the throne." The poet's lines are always true,—

"For faithful to its sacred page,
Heaven still rebuilds thy span,
Nor lets the type grow old with age,
That first spoke peace to man."

[IV.] *The village of the ark gives to us our first code of laws.* Plain, simple, and humane ; but dreadfully anticipating the passions which were to rage by-and-by, forecasting the time of murder—early times ; but containing the first rude traces of Divine Law. Every

village patriarchate must have some such principles. Here their announcement was attended by none of those tremendous manifestations which authenticated the Divine legation of Moses. The majesty of the Divine Law was not wanting; the personality of the Divine Lawgiver was imprinted everywhere in the solemn aspects of natural things, in the solitude which everywhere prevailed. And perhaps the chief item of that primeval law,—that item which has since been so frequently attempted to be set aside, the verdict of capital punishment on the crime of murder,—was the natural echo of a state of society in which we have reason to believe violence and murder abounded among the habitations of men. Curious it is to notice, too, that as man advances from era to era, laws increase with the increase of society. As man first steps forth with the shadows of the Fall around him, scarce a principle seems to mark the presence of Law. Here we advance quite another stage, to a new world; the principles of Law are not many, but they have multiplied. Man will be for ages a simple creature; but when the trumpets and thunders of Sinai reverberate amidst the glens and fastnesses of the wilderness, announcing a new code, inaugurating an absolutely new condition of society—a Theocracy—how large the volume is; and yet that how small compared with a Blackstone, not to speak of the immense and almost unknown folios in which, for instance, English law is enshrined! As society grows, laws increase, the ways

of men are so divergent. Of course most are founded in no principle of right: they constitute a mere expediency of the hour, and sometimes there runs through them a vein of true human injustice; sometimes, as tradition repeats it in the world before the Flood, and in Sodom before the flame, even laws themselves ceased to bear the venerable mace and sanction of righteousness, and become only the trick of the strong against the weak, the trick of the mighty few against the impoverished many. The law on Ararat differed from the law on Sinai; thus it was lodged in the memory, a code of simple sanctions as may be the case in many a village, as it was once probably in most villages; beneath the awning of some old father, the little community sat. It needed no ermined judge, no gowned barrister, no volumes of statutes; the very possibilities of infraction were few; but as sins grow, laws grow. Where there is no sin in the life, there can be no law in the conscience. Where violence has not lifted its rude hand, it has never been suggested that law should come in with its sword. "By the law is the knowledge of sin." Hence, then, around this first village pealed remote mutterings of storms yet to come, they could not be doubted, a tremendous past lay behind: the denizens of the young world were themselves not so innocent that they and their descendants might be dealt with as if all should flow forth only through ages of gold.

[V.] And soon it came; even *the village of the ark*

was the village of sin: even to Noah, the most righteous of men, the sin came—came even out of what seems to be the simplest and most natural pursuit of husbandry. Naturally he became a husbandman, and he planted a vineyard. What sweeter refreshment than God's beautiful grape? What more charming to the eye than the tendrils of the mounting vine? Tradition says, that when the first vine was planted, Noah beheld Satan busy at the roots. "What art thou pouring round the roots, Satan?" said Noah. "I have slaughtered a lion, and I am pouring forth its blood; for the fruit of the vine shall give courage." And yet again Noah beheld Satan busy at the roots of the vine, and he said to him, "What art thou doing, Satan?" And he said, "I have killed a swine, and I am pouring here its blood; for the fruit of the vine shall give impurity." And so it came about, and so it has continued. Was the vine some new and unknown graft? We need attach no moral culpability to Noah in that he himself became the first victim of his own plantation; he might be, and probably was, quite unconscious of the nature of the charming mischief he had fostered; he was not aware of the power of the beautiful deceiver. How charming are some of the most dangerous things: how beautifully the wanton hop disports herself; how gracefully its bitter fruits climb the stem! The first village had very soon an illustration of the singular way in which benefactions and blessings become snares and curses. Very in-

structive, on many accounts very affecting,—a great, good man, the survivor of a lost world, the stem and inheritor of a new, comes to the moment in life of dreadful overcoming. I have already said, I more than doubt if this fall of Noah is to be attributed to his will; he might have been in perfect ignorance of the properties of that which he had planted; he might have been simply “overtaken in a fault;” in any case, how instructive is the old story of these first villagers! We learn indeed that no eminence is so safe that it may regard itself or temptation with impunity; but we learn further what is the proper deportment to assume towards human infirmity and the sins or failures of the holy and the excellent. When “fools make a mock at sin,” either as sneering at the possibility of it, or ridiculing it when perhaps it shows itself in the excellent and the holy, they imitate the greater and more disgusting crime of Ham; be sure the sin and the punishment of Canaan is theirs. Surely it is very singular, Ham mocked at his father; his descendants have endured for their grotesque and abnormal humanity the sneer and mockery of the world ever since. Whatever we may say about it, it is simply so. And there is a blessing upon those who, like Shem and Japhet, do not mock at sin; but seek about for the mantle of charity which covers a multitude of sins, or stretch forth a hand of help to redeem.

Oh, sweet! oh, awful! first village of Ararat and

of the ark !—how solemn and how strange ! Eden had its beautiful bowers,—Eden left behind ; surely the wilderness had its forests and its pleasant glades ; but here all around stretched an unmade world ; true, we may believe they brought along with them such arts as pervaded the old societies, some of the rude graces of that primeval civilization : the secret of fire, the secret of the iron-stone, the secret of the plough, and the secret of the dart ; also the secret of music and of song. And so the village rose into shape and proportion. And still, wherever in holy societies the sacrifice of praise arises, and God's covenant with man is the happy hope of life, there is the village of the ark. Thus it is no legend, no mere history ; it is the story of one of the earliest symbols renewed to us from age to age ; our Lord renewed the figure of the Flood. He taught, that as it was in the days of Noah, when the world drifted carelessly on until "the flood came and swept them all away," "so also shall the coming of the Son of Man be."

As "Noah, moved with fear, prepared an ark," by which he became "heir of righteousness, which is by faith," so let us do. Once I beheld, when the great flood overwhelmed the world, and I saw all creatures and things borne away on its waves,—palaces and houses, rocks and trees, cities and thrones ; and the world was full of noises and cries. And I saw how many built their little frigates and pushed them off to tide over the deluge, and to outlive the storm and the

flood ; and stately ships set sail from harbours, and the navigators said, "See, we shall be safe !" And still "the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew," and "the hail swept away the refuge of lies," and "the water overflowed the hiding-place." Only one gallant vessel outlived the storm, and that was "in the hands of the Mediator," the Captain of Salvation. So with thee, O soul of man : come into the ark built by the Mediator. No scheme of science or philosophy, no other refuge is weather-tight or storm-proof. Safety only is in the hands of the Mediator. And if that Ark founders, the world is lost.

III.

Mamre, the Village among the Trees.

“Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain (*or the oaks*) of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the Lord.”—GEN. xiii. 18.

“Abram, the Hebrew . . . he dwelt in the plain (*or the oaks*) of Mamre the Amorite.”—GEN. xiv. 13.

MAMRÈ may well be the first distinctly described village in which we rest for meditation ; for it is probably the first village which comes distinctly before us in any authentic history. It is true Bethel and Beersheba and Moreh, or Shechem, divide the interests of Abraham ; but Mamre appears to be his first noticeable and beloved residence, remarkable for the most distinguished incidents which in those early pages characterized the life of the Father of the Faithful. Hence, if Ararat was the cradle of the races of our world, Mamre was the cradle of the Church. He to whom all look almost as a kind of second Adam, and without doubt the human progenitor of the Second Adam, fixed there his abode, beneath those magnificent heavens ; and on those

high moorlands he led in holy seclusion his life of faith. Without human associations, places have not much interest. The earth does not make history ; and yet how interesting becomes a spot of earth when associated with some human name—a battle-field, or a camp, the retreat of some brave heart or sweet singer, the haunt of some noble life ! Nature is dead without man ; he lends to it all its consecration and its charm ; he, like a sun or moon, lights it up with beams of majesty ; on earth there is nothing beautiful or sublime, or strong or terrible, but man makes it so. Hence, sequestered moorlands start out into mystery and to meaning ; and hence a very pathetic interest seems to gather over these heights of Mamre, where Abraham found apparently for his faith a first altar and home.

Those of you who are acquainted with the scenery of old England will be at no loss to conceive instantly the picture of the old village tree. There it stood, there it stands on the village green. What sports have gone on beneath it ; what stories been told by age—old age now sleeping soundly in the village churchyard ; what generations have passed beneath that tree ; what winters have fallen ; what snows upon its hoary branches ; what summers have shed their light there, through the green interlacing boughs. Among all the old things the eye turns lovingly to, fast being rooted out from us, there is not one I love more to look upon than the old oak, pride of the village green.

There stood just such a tree near to Hebron, most venerable, and consecrated by holiest traditions and legends. The stories of the families who had gathered beneath that tree, are they not all written in this Book? This was the patriarch Abraham's first home; from this spot he began to exchange the pastoral for the agricultural life. Here he sat in this oak grove—as we should more appropriately translate the word plain—in the heat of the day, when the angels came to him in the door of his tent; and it was from the outskirts of this spot that the Lord and Abraham talked of Sodom. This is the spot from which we start. Abraham's tree of Hebron, or Mamre, is one of the most consecrated memories and traditional associations of the Holy Land. There is, Dean Stanley says, standing still a large and ancient tree in the valley of Eshcol, (the sides of the valley are still covered by the vine), about a mile from Hebron, and this is claimed as Abraham's tree; it is not, however, probable that it is—that stood to the north of Hebron, where the ruins still remain called Abraham's House. The tree itself is said to have been burnt down only in the seventeenth century.*

Mamre is one of the most noticeable spots and village homes of the Bible: it is indeed the first most distinguished home; it was the home of Abraham. It

* Dr. Porter, however, in his most valuable handbook to Syria and Palestine, gives a lengthy description of Abraham's Oak in the Valley of Eshcol.

was not Hebron, but near to it. I can enable you to realize it. The Dyke, the Devil's Dyke, is not Brighton, but it is so near Brighton that if we were speaking of it in America or India, we might be forgiven if we regarded them as one and the same place. As you stand over the Dyke, Brighton is behind you, a few miles distant; and you look over that wonderful and extensive plain. It is comparing small things with very great things, but so I may assist you to obtain a view of Abraham's mountain home—three thousand feet above the sea,—a spot like the little village of Saddlescomb. From thence he could climb the heights and overlook all the cities of the plain—Sodom and Gomorrah with their corrupt inhabitants. It was the beginning of his experience of the promised land. It was a spot sufficiently removed from the contamination of the people of the plain, while it was not likely to provoke any difficulties from the community of Hebron.

His home was situated in the moorland; Mamre, indeed, means fruitfulness. Trees spread all round,—oaks; for we have said, that which we have translated *plain*, should be rendered, *the oak grove*. And we are carried back to the time of the Church under the oak. There still stands the tree called Abraham's tree; and if not the tree overshadowing the patriarch's tent, it is the representative of that grove in which the patriarch's village stood. Amidst the moorlands covered with flocks, and vineyards, and olive groves, and deep wind-

ing valleys, the memory of Abraham hovers over the whole scenery to this day; his strong but gentle life gives a name to Hebron and to the whole region. *El khulil*, the place of *the friend*; or the friend of God. In more than one place in Scripture he is called the "friend of God"; God speaks of him as "Abraham, my friend." Does not Abraham, although not a hero, and not faultlessly perfect, rise before you as one of the most elevated characters, perhaps the most elevated character of any age? What force in repose! what a royal Oriental gentleman! Manners how simple, dignity how unsurpassed,—not mingling with idolaters, although so near! High-souled communicant with nature, yet never communing with her to worship her! In him we become aware of the dignity and holiness of patriarchal life. It is true, the manifold complexities and collisions of interest which constitute the burden of cities were unknown to him. His estate was one of simple grandeur; his days flowed on in intercourse with God amidst the groves and hills and plains of the countries of the East. He walks before God with a perfect heart, and God Himself calls him His friend; in him was the origin of the Hebrew people. What nation looks back to a founder so fair?

Mamre, I take to have been a kind of wooded village among the downs and moorlands overhanging the ancient town. A village not near the sea, but surrounded by deep glades and solemn depths of

shade, standing there before anything we call civilization was born, the eldest village of which we have any authentic information in the night of that far-off time.

That, then, which we call in our translation the plain of Mamre, was the grove of Mamre, a place of trees—a village among the trees, trees clothing the moorland and the hill. Who can wonder that we are to find in the midst of such shades the retreats of the first families of the world? The dear old trees!—the costly glory and magnificence of old piles are young and poor beside these unconscious elaborations and trceries; the organ wakes no music like the winds amid their boughs; the stained glass of old cathedral windows but poorly imitates the splendid sheen, when twilight or summer evening comes among the green and leafy checkering of the fine gold of heaven.

“The lawns

And winding glades, high up like ways to heaven,
The slender coco's drooping crown of plumes,
The lightning flash of insect and of bird,
The lustre of the long convolvuluses
That coiled around the stately stems, and ran
E'en to the limits of the land; the glows
And glories of the broad belt of the world,—
All these he saw.”*

“Trees,” says Lamartine, “are the most celebrated of all the natural monuments of the universe. They

* Tennyson's “*Enoch Arden*.”

are equally consecrated by religion, poetry, and history; frequently mentioned in the sacred writings; they are one of the images for which the prophets evinced a peculiar predilection. The Arabs of all sects have a traditional veneration for the trees of Lebanon, attributing to them not only vegetative power which enables them to live for ever, but also a soul which enables them to give signs of wisdom and foresight similar to the instinct of animals or the intelligence of men. They are almost considered as divine beings under the form of trees." The Book of Genesis, in its wonderful beauty and simplicity, always carries us back to the old time of tree and temple worship under the trees.

[1.] *Mamre was a Church among the trees.* Trees are among the divinest and yet commonest symbols of the Holy Book for every order of Church life. Who does not love the sight of a noble tree? The earth holds not, or has not among unsentient things—if I may call them unsentient things—a nobler creature than a tree, a glorious and tall tree; the noble and beautiful thing cheats us into an admiration one cannot feel for many forms even of free animal life.

Abraham was himself just such a tree—a tree of righteousness—planted in the house of the Lord, bringing forth fruit in old age—flourishing. Does it seem I spend too many moments amidst those leafy recesses? Men have broken away from society

and social usages, and have left cities and towns behind them, and dwelt in forests and woods, that silence, and thought, and eternity, and God, and Christ might be present to them. I have never thought that it would be well to pass life so ; but is it not sweet to steal away from the noise, the dust, the smoke, the worry and the uncertainty of towns, and be there amidst the birds, the leaves, the aisles of the great forest minster all around us, and the long fingers of the mid-day, or the twilight, or the evening shadows calling to meditation and to rest ?

Come then to the Church under the oak ; let me lead you into the forest of many ages, among the trees of many shifting generations. "They shall be called the trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified." Indeed, all trees are His planting ; go into any forest, and you shall read the same lesson. But it is here especially. "There are the trees of the Lord that are full of sap ; there are the cedars of Lebanon He hath planted." Nothing so reminds me of human evanescence, but the existence of an idea that does not change, as the ancient patriarchal tree. In the magnificent aisles, and long winding woody colonnades of Fontainebleau, you come to the mighty tree they say was planted by Pharamond, the founder of the Frankish Empire—a mighty tree, vast in girth, vast in height. One cannot but think, Ah, what cavalcades have swept along,—Kings, Emperors, the Henrys of one age, the Napo-

leons of another,—all fleeting, all changing, but there stands the tree, there stand the trees. Then imagination, memory, and faith slip beyond the forest's boundaries: "They shall be called the trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified." I lose myself in the invisible realities. As Tasso, and Dante, and others have seen how trees became the vestures of men and spirits—saw men and spirits stepping forth from them—so have I found myself in the great wide Church; or, as Henry Vaughan says,—

" My God, when I walk in these groves,
And leaves Thy Spirit still doth fan,
I see in each shade that there grows,
An angel talking with a man."

"These are the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified." The forest is large, but the Church is larger than the forest. The forest is old, but older is the Church than the forest. The forest will endure, but far more enduring is the Church than the forest. "Ye shall be called trees." "Ye shall cast forth your roots as Lebanon, your branches shall spread, your beauty shall be as the olive-tree; ye shall grow as the vine." "Ye shall go from strength to strength," and "all the trees of the field shall clap their hands," when "instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle-tree."

“Trees of the Lord, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.”

All for God's glory! “His planting, that He may be glorified.” God is the end of the forest; God is the end of every tree in the forest. Only in the forest do I read the lessons of the immortal youth and freshness of nature. Think! What tree was that upon whose planks my Lord was crucified? Ah! think, He knew; He knew that seed or that sapling where it was planted; He saw, He knew, ay, He was able to watch while it grew to strength and maturity; He knew it was to be a cross; He saw the woodman go forth with his rude axe to hew down that tree; He knew that that tree was bearing the wood of death; He saw it, the rough knots in it; He knew it was to be the tree of righteousness to the whole world. He saw it all; it must have been so. He had known the history of that tree through all its ages, and so He knows all the trees of the forest; they are all before Him, they are all in His eye; trees of righteousness, that He may be glorified. And the whole invisible spiritual forest is related to that great planting; in that planting we are planted, planted with Him in the likeness of His death, planted with Him in the winter there, when the winds howl over the melancholy waste. To the planting of every tree goes a time of winds and storms, hail and sleet, and rain, and snow, and mire, and little seen. As the laying out of an orchard, the planting of a

park—ay, the scattering of the seeds through the wild spaces of the forest ; so was the night of Calvary. But still it was said : “ There shall come forth a rod out of Jesse, and a branch shall rise out of his roots.” So it will be : who that plants a forest, or wood, or orchard, or park, sees the end of it, sees the great leafy tabernacle rise—who ? Can we not, as we walk through these leafy lanes, these leafy arches, see this : can we not see some of the reasons of our own trials, and something of the nature of the great Divine plan ? Can we not see ?

Hark ! I hear voices in the tree-tops saying, We have been ages coming to what you see us ; for being God's things, we grow for ages. Whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever. Be comforted therefore. He who planned our life, plans yours ; we have seen generations pass along beneath our boughs, but we are here ; we can neither think nor feel, but so long our life is. Your life is shorter than ours that it may indeed be longer ; we are the scaffolding of His creation, you are the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified. Hear us whispering in the tree-tops, the voices of the trees to the downcast, down-hearted, many-spirited man ; our branches are of many centuries, and you too must take centuries to see things. Hear the whispering of the spirits in the boughs of the trees.

God's trees bear fruit. Come with me into the shade, cool and pleasant and still, and let us lose ourselves amidst these thoughts. “ They shall be

called trees." We are reminded how favourite a term this is for growth and proficiency in Divine grace. "His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law doth he meditate day and night, and he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, his leaf also shall not wither." He shall be like a tree that spreadeth out her roots by the river, that shall not see when heat cometh—so wide, so thick the shade—and shall not be careful in the year of drought; "the good man shall be satisfied from himself," and shall not cease from yielding fruit. Yes, they are trees of righteousness: "I have ordained you that ye shall go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit shall remain." It was the complaint of old, "Israel is an empty vine;" and then of an empty vine what saith the prophet? "What is the vine; what is the vine-tree more than any tree?"* It is useless, it is not beautiful, it is not fragrant: what is its use? To bear fruit. And if not? well, what then? And it was the glory of Joseph, that he was a fruitful bough.† This is what God expects. "Who planteth a vineyard and eateth not of the fruits thereof?" A beast differs from a man by reason, and a beast differs from a stone by sense, and a plant differs from a stone by vegetation; so a Christian differs from a man of the world by fruit. "Ye shall be called trees of righteousness." The righteousness of faith always bears the fruits of

* Ezekiel xv. 2, 3.

† Genesis xlix. 22.

righteousness. Alas ! how scanty the fruit ! What a description that is in Isaiah xvii. 6, "two or three berries on the top of the uppermost bough." "A little strength." "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit, so shall ye be my disciples." It is an expressive image—trees, fruit-bearing trees, trees of righteousness ; and so a spiritual society should be the world's conservatory,—life for it, health for it, medicine for it. The book of the prophet Ezekiel is really a singular essay on the divine analogies of trees ; it so describes the spiritual society, the Church, where the river flows, that is, Gospel ordinances, means of grace, prayer and praise, by which the sound man grows (Ezekiel xlvii. 12). For if we would be fruit-bearing trees, we must be near the waters of the sanctuary, and be near to each other. The observation has been made, while some trees grow best alone—need a vast space, the myrtle and the olive grow best in company. It is true, some mighty forest monarchs defy companionship, they rear their tall crests and stretch out their vast broad arms alone. Trees of righteousness these, lonely, lofty trees ; but the trees planted in God's orchard should not be usually distant from each other. And moisture helps fruitfulness ; plants thrive from their dews, Christians grow by their tears. Many a tree pricked and letting forth its gums, is fuller of fruit ; and sweetest of all these trees of righteousness that have been pricked to the heart.

“Trees of righteousness, that He might be glorified.” God will be glorified in all trees of His planting; all that He hath not planted shall be rooted up; and while the fruitful Christian comes as a shock of corn in his season, it may be feared the unfruitful come as a bundle of straw—the one for the harvest, the other for the oven. Thus we think as the fiery light retires, and twilight steals over the fair forest trees—trees of righteousness, the plants of Divine intention and purpose, fruitful and therefore to His praise. Thus then behind the tree there stands an immortal spirit stretching out its arms to immortality. And soon transplanted shall he be and the mystery of the forest past. The place of fruitfulness, of material and spiritual fruitfulness; such was Mamre.

[II.] *It was a refuge for faith.* How came Abraham there? We know he left Ur of the Chaldees; he with his father, and they settled for some time in the wild plains of Haran. Abraham and the patriarchs were emigrants; he left for the honour of God. The East is full of traditions concerning him and his hatred to idolatry, and how he forsook the worship of fire and the sun. A tradition tells us how Nimrod sent for Abraham and said to him, “Wilt thou not worship these idols? Will thou adore fire?” “Why not water which quenches fire?” said Abraham. “Very well,” said Nimrod; “then adore water.” “But why not the clouds which swallow the water?” “So be it; adore the clouds.” “Rather let me adore the winds which

blow the clouds about." "So be it ; pray to the wind." "But man can stand up against the wind and build it out of his house." Then Nimrod exclaimed in fury, "Fire is my god, and that shall consume you."* From place to place he removed his tent, he journeyed, going on still ; we should read, "He pulled up," namely, his tent pins, going on and pulling up, so he advanced from one station to another ; "*Let us take our journey and go*"† should be "*Let us pull up the pins of our tents and let us go.*" Thus was it with the father of the faithful, and so with us till we reach that land. "Thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down ; *not one of the stakes shall be removed*, neither shall any of the cords be broken."

Mamre, the beloved home of the father of the faithful and the friend of God ; the designation concerning it is, that there he built an altar to the Lord. He had come from that neighbourhood where the Babel society was founded—faith, not in God, but in the vanity of bricks—it had all ended in confusion ; but the sacred memories, the holy associations of Mamre, where Abraham reared an altar to God, these all linger and send out their influence still. The character of Abraham rises at Mamre. Some have called Herodotus the father of history, and some

* "Legends of Old Testament Characters from the Talmud," etc. By Rev. Baring Gould.

† Genesis xxxiii. 12.

have called Moses the father of history, but rather was not Abraham? And does not life become domestic and human beneath those tents and trees? "He called on the name of the Lord." Mamre becomes a lighthouse to all future ages. Domestic life began; and I daresay they had family jars,—all the patriarchs had; and Sarah was made, I fancy, of peculiarly tough and irritable and troublesome material. We know they had their family grievances and doubts. First, they had no children; and then, because Sarah herself could not trust God—as Abraham said to her, "Nay, but thou didst laugh"—they had one too many. But a high faithfulness ruled the tents of Mamre, the home of domestic piety—the first story given to us, of the Life of Faith, where Abraham reared an altar and called on the name of the Lord.

[III.] *The village of Mamre was the village of sacred promise.* What night was that, when among its moorlands the Lord appeared to Abraham in vision, and consecrated those heights by the glowing promises we recognise this day as true? Travellers in the Holy Land tell us how magnificent the midnight heavens are as compared with ours. The stars do not seem to adhere to the face of the heavens, but hang like burning lamps midway between the heavens and the earth, while the deep expanse of the blue ether is seen lying far beyond.* In such a night on

* "Stars arose, but such stars!—not like the spangles of the English

the heights of Mamre, God appeared to Abraham and said, "Look now toward heaven and tell the stars;" and He said, "so shall thy children be." A little mountain hamlet, how incredible did it seem! It was the promise of Messiah's reign, as the Saviour said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day."

[IV.] *Mamre! what guests came thither!* That is a pretty story told by Jeremy Taylor in his "Liberty of Prophesying," and I do not remember to have seen it elsewhere, although I am told it is to be found in one of the Talmuds; how that Abraham was sitting at his tent door, ready, according to his wont, to entertain strangers, when there came along an old man, worn by age and labour, and leaning on a staff; and Abraham received him in the tent at Mamre kindly, and washed his feet and provided supper for him. But Abraham noticed that he did not pray nor ask for a blessing; and when he inquired he found that the old man worshipped fire only; and then the patriarch thrust him forth from his tent into the dark night. But when the old man was gone, God spoke to Abraham, and asked where the stranger was; and Abraham replied, "I thrust him away because he did not worship Thee." And then God replied to him,

poet's conception, 'those patines of bright gold,' though that idea is beautiful; but one could see that they were round orbs that flashed streams of diamond light from out their brightness."—"Bye-ways in Palestine," by J. Finn, M.R.A.S.

“Have I borne with him a hundred years, and couldst not thou endure him one night?” And surely from whatever source the legend is derived, it is a very beautiful one, and shows what wise lessons they were able to teach in very ancient times.

Here was that great entertainment made, where, says quaint Thomas Fuller, “the covert of the tree was the dining-room, probably the ground the board, Abraham the caterer, and Sarah the cook; a welcome their cheer; angels, and Christ in the notion of an angel, their guests; and the last promise of the birth of Isaac their offering for their entertainment.” Thus again Mamre becomes the portal and threshold through which Abraham held communion with the invisible world; two of the beings called angels passed on to Sodom, and Abraham held high intercession with him called the Lord. How safe was Mamre while the arms of fire were stretching over the cities of the plain! That evening all was luxuriance in the city, all the gaiety of that wild wicked time; when Abraham rose, smoking ruins marked the place where now roll the waves of the salt and bituminous Dead Sea. How it came to pass that Abraham for a time left Mamre we know not; he seems to have left shortly after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; but it may be well believed he loved it too well to be long away: thither he returned. It is possible Isaac was born here; and that among those crags happened that great mystery of the offering of Isaac.

[V.] *Go to Mamre or to its neighbourhood to find of all the graves of this earth the oldest authentic grave—the grave of the faithful one—of the friend of God, who is also the father of the faithful as between men and men. High and sacred lessons are borne to us from that place of graves; faith shines indeed like a star over that tomb—trust in God and allegiance to Him, faithfulness also to man, a faithfulness which did not measure its duties by the sense of the king of Sodom or the kings of the Valley of Shaveh, but by the divine sense shining in a heaven-informed soul.*

Dean Stanley says one of the most singular associations, which most strangely struck him, was, that here, for the first time, was heard the great funeral dirge over Abner, whose last echo I had heard in St. Paul's Cathedral over the grave of the Duke of Wellington. And marvellous too to think that within the massive enclosure of that Mosque lies possibly not merely the last dust of Abraham and Isaac, but the very body, the mummy, the embalmed bones of Jacob, brought in solemn state from Egypt to this, as it then was, lonely and beautiful spot.

What constitutes a village? A home, an altar, a grave, the household, the church and the churchyard; so the place of trees became naturally, in the course of time, a place of tombs. There death at last shadowed the household of the downs and the trees. At the age of one hundred and twenty-seven Sarah

died. Opposite to Mamre, and nearer to Hebron, was a place of caves; and among the million cemeteries of the earth this is remarkably distinguished, sacred, inviolate, and luminous as from the ever-burning lamp of divine truth shining from the most ancient times.

IV.

Moreh, the Village by the Well.

“And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land.”—GEN. xii. 6.

“Sychar . . . Jacob’s well was there. . . . Our Father Jacob . . . gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle.”—JOHN iv. 5, 6, 12.

SHECHEM, or Sychar. But it is not with Shechem we have principally to do. Ditchling is not Brighton; and Moreh (or Shalim, for they are one) is not Shechem; it stood about two miles, or a little more, outside of Shechem, quite distinct from the town. And there is the spot called Shalim, or Salim (of course it is not John the Baptist’s Salim), to this day. On that spot is still the ruin, mentioned by every traveller, of Jacob’s well; and just below it is Joseph’s tomb. The Holy Land has few more venerable spots than that piece, or, as it is called, that “parcel of ground”; it links together such different ages—Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Joshua, Jesus; and it is still the same “parcel of ground.”

How strangely some places seem to be a kind of stage on which the action shall commence and close ! It is surely singular that this was the first spot on which Abraham rested in the Holy Land ; and this was the spot where our Lord announced that the exclusive polity of Hebrewism had closed. Here, under an old oak, Abraham founded the Hebrew Church ; here it was planted and succoured ; and here, nearly two thousand years later, Jesus sat by the well and announced that sublime truth, that the worship of God is altogether independent of place. "God is a Spirit" ; He is not limited to the highest of earth's o'ergazing mountains ; He is to be worshipped, indeed, but He is to be "worshipped in spirit and in truth"—"the Father seeketh such to worship Him." It is the loveliest spot of all the Holy Land, "the only very beautiful spot," Dean Stanley says, "in all Central Palestine. In other spots the light falls in fiery lines, but here the tenderness of sweet atmospheric tints charms the scene." It was the first spot where Abraham alighted when he crossed the Jordan ; on that spot, clothed with terebinth-trees, now the region of the wild olive, he built the first pure altar the Holy Land had known. As we read he did at Beersheba, he did here—planted a grove, and "called there on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God." What wonder that it was so, "before man learnt to hew the shaft and lay the architrave" ? Trees—what a psaltery they make anywhere, the beech and the

birch, the oak and the fir! For the oak says of God, He is strong; and the birch says, He is graceful; and the ash says, He is mysterious; and the fir says, He is fearful; and the beech says, He is beautiful. Abraham's trees are older than Byzantine basilica, or Norman arches, or Gothic columns. They also became abused. What is there man does not abuse? The time came when the boughs and the thick interlacing branches and the deep shadows of the hoary wood shut out God from the eye, and they had to be forsaken—nay, cut down; for they too were by the perverting spirit made to war with higher truths than themselves. The spirit of the wind amidst their branches drowned the voice of God, otherwise how natural. They could not build chapel or temple, so the patriarchs there assembled servants and family, and beneath that shady fane called upon the name of the Lord. Surely it was a noble and worthy structure, "a temple not made with hands"! Amidst those leafy recesses our fathers called upon the name of their Lord. And still the spirit of worship comes over us among the trees. And if you carry the thought of Grace and something above Nature into such a temple, how shall we find one lifting the heart more!

"By grace divine,
Not otherwise, O Nature, we are thine,"

said Wordsworth. The hints of the Bible, the word of God, found like a sunbeam in a wood, where we

did not think to find it, where it is for the walking if not for the seeking. I find the word of God here among these wonderful scenes and biographies of old time, of earliest time. Oh, let us ever read the Bible so : "it is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for instruction in righteousness." "Search the Scriptures." Thus, by an act of worship, Abraham took possession of the land "he was after to receive for an inheritance."

Under the trees of Moreh, Abraham reared his altar and temple. To this place came Jacob, and constituted it a village.* Its history is very distinctly given : "And Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built him an house, and made booths for his cattle : therefore the name of the place is called Succoth. And Jacob came to Shalem, a city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padan-aram ; and pitched his tent before the city. And he bought a parcel of a field, where he had spread his tent, at the hand of the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, for an hundred pieces of money. And he erected there an altar and called it El-elohe-Israel," *i.e.*, God, the God of Israel. This was the origin of the village of Moreh, or Shalem. "Now Jacob's well was there." But, singular, beyond and all around, the neighbourhood abounds with wells. The existence of the well is incontestable ; but whatever was it

* Gen. xxxiii. 18.

cut for? It is, I think, easy to perceive. The jealousy with which various tribes guard their wells is proverbial. Among the most dangerous outrages in the Holy Land, is the filling up or destroying the well. Jacob, with that prudence of which he was so consummate,—some think too dangerous,—a master, wished to check all advance among the dangerous idolaters of Shechem; so he would have his own well, as a means of independence and of prudence. "Jacob's well was there."

But Jacob's Church under the oak of Moreh, was not like that of Abraham's by Mamre; you feel that it was not; you feel that it was a motley assemblage. A large family is not as a small one; and, somehow, few of Jacob's sons, and none of those best known, commend themselves to us. We judge of Israel by what we have received from it, else "the hole of the pit whence it was digged" was full of mire, and "the rock whence" the nation "was hewn," very hard.

Let hundreds of years pass away. What has passed? Surely the very names and memories of Jacob and Abraham have perished from the spot. Jacob's dust lies with that of his grandfather Abraham and his grandmother Sarah in Machpelah, that is near Mamre or Hebron. And now his children return to take possession indeed of Canaan. Here, in the old farm beneath those trees, was born Joseph; amidst these fields, while yet a boy, he dreamed and meditated. Jacob removed and went to Bethel, still keep-

ing up relations with the old pasture-land near Shechem; hither Joseph was sent by his father to seek his brethren;* here his brethren conspired to slay him as they saw him; hence they sold him into Egypt. We know the rest. And now, when the long generations had passed away, to this spot the bones of the young dreamer, the great chancellor of the greatest nation of his day,—the greatest statesman of his time,—were brought back to repose where still you see his tomb, only a little distance from, and on the same “parcel of ground” as “Jacob’s well.” “By faith Joseph, when dying, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel, and gave commandment concerning his bones.”

And in that day the old oak was standing still—Abraham’s, Jacob’s oak. To this spot Joshua gathers the people, and he has set up the Law. “So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem. And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God, and took a great stone, and set it up there *under an oak*, that was by the sanctuary of the Lord.”† Shechem lies in a long valley or pass between a chain of hills—on the one hand Gerizim, on the other Ebal. Now Ebal is a large prickly-pear garden; and Gerizim rears up its broad forehead of orange-coloured rocks,

* Gen. xxxvii. 12.

† Joshua xxiv. 25, 26; Deut. xxvii.

with their dark fissures and fringes of brushwood. Surely never was country taken possession of in such a manner : as Moses commanded, so did they. And the whole nation of Israel, with all the women and little ones, were there ; and the blessings were announced from Mount Gerizim, and the curses on disobedience thundered back from Ebal. No vain show. Travellers have tested the spot ; and still even an ordinary tone of voice rolls audibly over the hills, and is heard in every accent two miles away. Something like this we have heard when shepherds have spoken to shepherds among the mountains of Westmoreland or Cumberland, or in the passes of the higher Alps. Amidst the silence of the evening, how often have we heard among the hills voices of persons speaking to and answering each other. Lamartine says of the villages of the Holy Land, "There are some in which the voice of a man, speaking in another village, can be distinctly heard ; and yet an hour is required to travel from one to the other." Joshua there read all the words of the Law, the blessings and the curses ; "there was not a word of all that Moses commanded which Joshua read not before the congregation of Israel."

Were you ever surprised at the story told of Jotham, when he went and stood on the top of Mount Gerizim,*

* Dr. Thompson in "The Land and the Book," says :—"Several lofty precipices of Gerizim literally overhang the city, any one of which would answer his purpose. Nor would it be difficult to be heard, as

and lifted up his voice, and cried and said unto them, "Hearken unto me, ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you;" and not a word of the parable but was heard, ere "he ran away, and fled, and went to Beer"?

A wonderful spot! There was Sychar, or Shechem,—now Neapolis,—the metropolis of the Samaritans; and to this spot among the hills, amidst fields clothed with corn, the olive-clothed heights of Gerizim, the vineyards and the orchards, came the weary Traveller, and, sitting on the well-side, announced that all was changed, that God could be sought, worshipped, and found through any form or without any form, neither in this mountain of Gerizim, where stood the Samaritan temple, nor yet at Jerusalem; and yet in and at both might men worship the Father.* So the history of

every one knows who has listened to the public criers of villages on Lebanon. In the stillness of evening, after the people have returned home from their distant fields, he ascends the mountain side above the place, or to the roof of some prominent house, and there lifts up his voice, and cries as Jotham did; and he gives forth his proclamation with such distinctness, that all can hear and understand it. Indeed, the people in these mountainous countries are able, from long practice, so to pitch their voices as to be heard distinctly at distances almost incredible. They talk with persons across enormous valleys, yet speak very little louder than their usual tone of conversation."

* "Jesus had not intended to enter the town, it is clear. He was waiting here while His disciples went up the valley, to buy food in the town; and then they would have followed the road through the plain to Samaria. There was no inducement to any Jew to enter any Samaritan city, if he could avoid it. But when the townsmen came out to Him, and showed an open-minded interest in hearing of the Messiah, and of its having become lawful, in the mind of a Jew, to worship elsewhere

Moreh commences, and so it closes, with a perfection and unity which might amaze us if we did not believe that thus, God's "greatness—

"Flows around our incompleteness,
Round our restlessness His rest ;"—

if we did not see in that unity which pieces together the broken portions of time, something yet higher, when our life shall seem as the heights of Moreh, and the well, and the temple, and the tomb be all resolved

than in the Temple, Jesus entered the city, and abode there two days. No scene of these ancient incidents is more clear and interesting than this. It is impossible not to see His very gestures, when He spoke of "this mountain"—the Gerizim which rose above Him ; and when He bade His hearers lift up their eyes and look on the fields, "already white unto harvest," the tilled land of Jacob's plain which stretched before Him. The simplicity of the controversy, in the woman's statement of it, and appeal to the authority of forefathers, and the Teacher's assertion of the superiority of Jewish worship—"Ye worship ye know not what ; we know what we worship"—the naturalness of this is so exquisite as to give on the spot the impression of modernness, and to make one feel more like an actual spectator of the incident than I had ever yet felt in any of the sacred localities. No part of the narrative is, to my mind, more striking than the offer of hospitality, the invitation to Jesus to stay in the city. The sorest point of the controversy being this temple on Gerizim,—the Jews abhorring it, and the Samaritans feeling the hardship of their forefathers having been excluded from the Jerusalem Temple,—how the news must have run through Sychar, that a teacher had come from Jerusalem itself, who said that men might worship any and every where ! Here was an opening for peacemaking, and for something higher still ; for exalting and spiritualizing the religious conceptions of earnest and anxious inquirers. Here were 'friendly dealings' indeed between Jews and Samaritans ; and in the higher party, that loving care which made Him ever vigilant over the perplexed and wandering, to bring them home, that there might be 'one fold and one Shepherd.'"—Miss Martineau's "Eastern Life," pp. 517, 518.

into one beneath His eternal providence and love whose spirit of truth keeps mercy for thousands, and whose ways of love may indeed be read in time, but who holds His infinite and most blessed reserves for the eternal hills.

MOREH, *then, was the village of the well*—thus, probably almost every village; but this village derives especially its significance from the well outside the town, removed at some little distance from it; the history of the neighbourhood converges and gathers there. That well is set apart by holy circumstances and signs; its waters become symbolic. Indeed, everywhere in the Holy Land the well became such a sacred spot, around it gathered the household, the people of the primeval farm, the flocks grazed, even as of this, of which the woman said to our Lord, “Our father Jacob gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle.” The well was the chief property of the place and the great proprietor; and hence the chief enmity was shown in the attempt of the foes and Philistines to fill up and destroy the wells; as we read, “All the wells which had been digged in the days of Abraham, the Philistines had stopped them and filled them with earth. And Isaac digged again the wells of water which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father, for the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham.”

And this is a singular story; it is characteristic of

the times to which it refers ; but it is descriptive of the country also in the present day,* and I take it that the text I have read is a summary of the story of the series of the wells which Israel opened. For the well became consecrated, its flowing waters were made to lisp a holy hymn of praise to the God of the everlasting covenant. They were the shrines of holy thought and adoration ; they were indeed holy wells. They were homes situated amidst the rolling valleys, often in drear and desolate solitudes and wastes ; around them the patriarchal hosts assembled, there they pitched their tents. Home and God are the

* "A young Frank was one day chatting with the seraskier about these desert tribes, and between two puffs of his chibouque delivered himself of an opinion that a regiment of English rifles and a company of London police would in two months purge all the wadies round Jerusalem from this black pestilence of tents. The grave Oriental smiled, and for a moment the wideawake and the turban dipped towards each other over the pipe of peace. In the black cloud which rose and curled before the Frank, a picture grew into shape ;—scene, a wild hilly country in the Abruzzi ; figures, a captain in green dress and dark feathers, leading on men, agile as panthers, armed to the teeth, and of a courage and endurance equal to their speed ; action, the failing chase of a ragged bandit, ill-fed, ill-armed, who had his home in the forest. And looking into this familiar picture, the Saxon also smiled. 'The problem,' said the seraskier, laying down his pipe, 'is, how to follow the Bedaween in his flight. They ride upon good mares. They know the wells. A mounted troop must carry food, must count on finding water. The sun is fierce, and there is neither tree for shade nor town for rest. When the Bedaween find themselves pressed by an enemy, they stop the wells.' *This power of stopping the well* has always been the Syrian's defence. When the Assyrians were preparing to invade Judah, how did Hezekiah meet them? He fought against the Assyrians as the Taamra would now fight against the Turks, *by concealing the wells.*"—Hepworth Dixon's "Holy Land," chap. xxiii.

two ideas which seem to shine and lighten through the bosoms of these world's first fathers. They dug a well, and they reared an altar. They said, "Spring up, O well," and "they called on the name of the Lord."

But the Philistines were a host of vagabond Bedouins ; they roamed through the land, they had no idea of home, of the sanctity of family, of the God of the whole earth. A mysterious people, they were not the people of God ; they had not the ideas of home and God ; to them the tents of Abraham and Isaac were an invasion and an offence. Surely the most graceless act of men, is to stop up the well ! Why, it implies, We will neither drink there ourselves, nor will we permit the traveller to pitch his tent and to drink. Rather than that the old watercourse should flow, they would throw into the waters any putrifying carcase, they would make it to be a cairn of stones, a heap of desolation ; thus the Philistines stopped the well. It is impossible not to notice how, in the digging of these wells, the act became religious, and overflowed with religion. And how famous they became—consecrated by precious memories and holy hopes ! One of the most illustrative of all these places or wells was Beersheba,—one of these sacred villages by a well ; if not so historically remarkable as Moreh, still it was remarkable as one of the first homes of the Father of the Faithful. It was where Abraham had dwelt ; it was from thence he had

proceeded on his journey to offer up Isaac. There they held together those frequent and, I doubt not, mysterious communions. Near to this spot, in after years, Jacob dwelt ; here, ages after, Elijah lay down under a juniper-tree ; it is even to-day one of the sweetest spots in the Holy Land. The lovely herbage spreads ; here are no sheets of sands, but larks and birds of song soar and sing over the traveller's head. Such, probably, would be every patriarchal resting-place,—spots of peace, rest for the weary foot, rest for the weary heart. Behold, then, the stern and dreary mountains, or the long rolling valleys, how they stretch into the distance. Yonder are the wastes of sand, or the red rock cliffs ; there the wild Arab wanders ; but here, in Moreh or in Beersheba, are the tents of peace. There "God gave them of the dew," sweet pastoral glades spread round, instead of the waste howling wilderness. The God of the covenant descended there, and blessed their morning and evening sacrifice. Content and peace were there ; Isaac was able to go "out into the fields at eventide to meditate" : it was the place of the well ; the thirsty hart stopped there to drink, and the tents spread round the pleasant pools.

On such a scene the dark, the vagrant, and predatory Philistine looked with evil eye. It was not that there were not many other spots where he might dig for wells ; but he desired to stop that, and to scatter those flocks. The name of the covenant God was

hateful to him ; the altar and all the consecrations of the place,—the sacrifices, whose clouds of incense rolled straight up like columns through the pure air—their hymns, for doubtless they sang,—where was ever found the people, especially a religious people, who did not sing ? So every well became a scene of strife, while the mild and modest Isaac still went on his way, and dug another well, and the Philistine rushed on joyful, like a madman, to stop the flowing waters. Such an affecting picture of a dried-up well or spring is given in Job :—

“ My brethren have dealt deceitfully as a brook,
And as the stream of brooks they pass away ;
Which are blackish by reason of the ice,
And wherein the snow is hid.
What time they wax warm they vanish ;
When it is hot they are consumed out of their place.
The paths of their way are turned aside,
They go to nothing and perish.
The troops of Tema looked,
The companies of Sheba waited for them,
They were confounded because they had hoped,
They came thither and were ashamed.”

Such is the picture ; it corresponds to that text I have quoted of the stopping of the patriarch's wells. I cannot but believe that the Spirit which indited it for us intended that we should take it as a parable. Are we not also aware of Philistines—vagrants, who, with no settled purpose, would close the ancient wells our fathers opened, and consecrated to the names of

home and God?—for there are sacred refreshments, there are pure and holy joys, there are opportunities and means of grace; and there have always been those to whom they have been a hissing and a contempt. And we are always in fear of the predatory wandering bands who would, if they could, stop up the old wells, the ancient watercourses. And in many cases they have succeeded; and we need to call the camp together to dig again the wells of water which Abraham our father digged, and which the Philistines have stopped up.

For, if we listen to some men, we shall have no water springs. Oh, we need to be on our guard, on our watch against the vagrant spirit of our own and of every age! The Philistine, "the Canaanite, is still in the land," and the wells of the fathers are in danger. How easily is a well stopped up, too, that is not used, and where no tribe encamps, and to which no maiden comes at evening with the pitcher! A drift of sand may easily be blown into it by some east wind; a dead body may defile it; and even disuse may make it stagnant and bitter to the taste. So it is that the old wells are often in every age stopped; they become choked, and their waters cease to flow. What were these wells? What are they? Let us see.

There is that wonderful well, *God*. God, of whom a great soul said in the old day, "All my springs,"—or, as one translation reads it, "All my fresh springs are

in Thee." What, and is it possible to stop up that well? Why, it is possible to shut out God from our thoughts; and many are the ingenious methods adopted by Philistine hosts in our day to aid us to do so. Still the inquiry is often made, as in the days of Job,—“And who is God, that I should pray to Him?” There are those who “never say, Where is God my Maker?” There is no thought like the thought of God,—God who is love, God who is life, God who is light. The ancient God, eternal youth, freshness; eternal, ever-present consciousness; He is always like a well ever near. But it is possible with our notions and our fancies to stop up the infinite well from watering our hearts and flowing by our door. Hard thoughts of God are indulged, like the man with the one talent—“I knew thee to be a hard man,” and so he would not serve; and he lost the love and the consolation of the well; he stopped it.

And there is the well *Prayer*. Oh, before how many of our doors that well of living water is almost as a stagnant pool! We so seldom let down our pitcher into the well, we almost forget how to pray. Yet what refreshment there is when we can pray indeed! And then we impair our own comfort in prayer by wondering about prayer, and philosophizing upon it, as we might, when thirsty, by inquiring how the water came to be made, or how it came to flow; and of course the Philistines will aid us heartily to stop the well. What an absurd practice, even if God

is, to speak to Him!—as if He needed that we should speak to Him! And so we stop the well.

And then *The Sabbath*; there was an ancient well! Man's day of rest and worship, the time of the holy and consecrated hours, and hymns, and services. How much more reasonable to retreat into the country, to take a railway journey, and to continue the hot and dusty week into the Sabbath hours, until the well is choked up, all distinctions in time lost, and man is chained through the whole of the seven days to the unvarying life of toil! And thus all faith goes—faith, whose pure limpid waters flow freshly, and create a green herbage even round the precincts of the most distressing cares. Truly we are able to see how the wells which Abraham digged are stopped by the Philistines.

But they won back all the wells; and, as in so many portions of Scripture, there is a singular history of progress in their gradual restoration of the old waters. It is given to us* how with difficulty they got them all back, and in the true spirit of the Hebrew, who turned every act into a memorial, giving it as a sign for recollection. "And Isaac's servants digged in the valley and found there a well of springing water. And the herdmen of Gerar did strive with Isaac's herdmen, saying, The water is ours: and he called the name of the well Esek (contention); because they strove with

* See the whole story, Genesis xxvi.

him. And they digged another well, and strove for that also : and he called the name of it Sitnah (hatred). And he removed from thence, and digged another well, and for that they strove not : and he called the name of it Rehoboth (room) ; for he said, For now the Lord hath made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land. And he went up from thence to Beersheba " (that is, the well of the oath or the covenant).

The wells were more easily lost than regained. We must prize our old wells ; let us drink of them ; let us find our refreshment in the great thought of God, in His life, His being ; in the power of prayer, in the waters of faith, in the Sabbath ordinances and means of grace. In our day, as in every day, efforts are made by philosopher, novelist, and satirist, to stop the wells. Do not therefore fight them, but drink of the waters of the well ; so shall they be ever pure and fresh, and for refreshment flowing. They will invigorate you ; they will bless you. Keep an active piety ever in your heart, so shall no Philistine be able to defraud you of your spring.

"What makes thee so musical?" said one to a little spring. "Action," said the little spring. "I lay still in my mountain cradle for a long while ; the shadow of the great eagle swept across me ; I knew nothing but the shadows of clouds and rocks, but they were silent, and I was unhappy. But up there, where no flowers grow, a grey old mossy lichen sometimes bent over me ; but I longed to sing, to wake the hills.

Then the rains fell into my basin, and I overflowed, and the rocks sent my rills down on every side, and the snows melted into my cup, and I was free ; and I danced and I sang along the valleys, I tumbled over the stones, and made music like bells over the cresses, and gave melody like fairy flutes in endless harmonies; and action makes me musical," said the little stream.

So may it be with us! then the Philistines shall not stop our wells. We will not seek to argue or to fight, but take fresh draughts from our own wells. In this not "seeking for some great thing to do, or curious thing to know;" and if our wells have been stopped, now let us begin to dig them again. There is no refreshment like that we derive from them; they are eternal, like God, in their origin—eternal, like our souls, in their end.

V.

Bethel, the Village of Right Talks and Visions.

“He found him in Bethel, and there He spake with us.”—HOSEA xii. 4.

BETHEL—we may, I think, take this to be the most household name of all the villages or towns of the Bible. Jerusalem is the city of the Church ; it is viewed “as a city compact together, whither the tribes go up unto the house of the Lord, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord.” But Bethel is the name which has come to be associated with home, domestic life, and service ; it is the name of the place where the God we worship was met and adored when there were no temples, when there were even no tabernacles consecrated to His service ; it teaches us how the home begins what the temple and the tabernacle carry forward, and what heaven,—of which the seer in his exalted vision says, “I saw no temple therein,”—ends. It is very interesting to notice, as travellers tell us, that from the heights of Bethel you can easily see Jerusalem ; it is at a distance of about twelve miles. So every earthly Bethel has Jerusalem

full in view ; it is from the holy home we see the larger Church ; and it is from the heights of Bethel here on earth we descry the fair minarets and towers of "Jerusalem the golden."

Bethel was the home of the patriarchs ; it also was one of the first places where Abraham pitched his tent, and built an altar, and called on the name of the Lord ; and to this spot he returned ; from this spot, as well as from Mamre, he was able to look over the wonderful plain. He was "a stranger and pilgrim in the land" in which his children were to be possessors ; and it is in fact on a broad plain, and it lies on the grand highway of the Holy Land. Near to this spot, Lord Lindsay says, his eye rested on the loveliest scenery his eye ever beheld,—olives, fig-trees, vineyards, and corn-fields,—plainly showing how truly this might be the glory of all lands. If there is a curse,—and a curse there is, for all is barrenness now,—then it is upon the inhabitants and not on the soil.

To this Bethel came Jacob ; as you well know, here he laid himself down, and in the open air, on the desert sand, probably beneath the shady almond trees, he dreamed his wonderful dream.

"Who would not sleep on such a bed,
With a stony pillow for his head ?
Nearer to thy God in sleep,
Tasting fellowship more deep,
Entering heaven in glorious dreams,
Drinking there of living streams."

Not that the lodging was bad ; travellers in the Holy Land often rest in such an inn, and prefer it to that in the village or the town. And the spot became hallowed as the generations passed on, as Bethel, the house of God ; the wild spot became conspicuous in holy history. But what strange stories are told about that stone which Jacob took for his pillow ! About what will not man tell strange stories ? It was preserved through many ages ; after the destruction of Jerusalem it was somehow removed to Scotland ; it was the famous stone of consecration used in the coronation of the Scottish kings, and when Edward I. conquered Scotland it was removed to England ; and it may now be seen beneath the Confessor's chair or coronation throne in Westminster Abbey ! A singular story,—a sufficiently foolish tradition.

But what does abide, and has lasted all these long generations,—near four thousand years,—is this old name, Bethel. Bethel, too, was a place of trees ; Divine service made it a house of God. Through all the hundreds of years the patriarchs were away, it retained its name ; it became the home of the prophets ; it became the hall of the judges ; Samuel judged there ; it became the burial-place of prophets ; it became a school of the prophets ; it became, and is now, the very word for a holy home. What would you mean if you were to say of any one, " His house is a perfect Bethel " ? And how many places we have in this country where there was once some pious

man, his pious wife, these forming a holy family, honouring God for His own sake, not for the sake of building up any particular Church,—only from mere faith, mere love. From some lone cottage, some farm among the hills, there rose the holy hearty hymn, there was read the sacred word, there was sweet family prayer, there was led the devout life, there was Bethel ; and now there is the house of God, and there is the larger gathering, and Bethel the temple dates back to Bethel the cottage or the farm.

Bethel illustrates this to us, how it is from the household, and from what the first household of our youth and fancy is, that the holy seed grows into forest-like fruitfulness ; it is the household principle. I have heard of families who have held a farm, have lived in one house for hundreds of years ; from generation to generation they kept the condition of the farm ; in many things they improved upon the manners of their ancestors, but there was the same farm, the same rooms, the same fields. So the Bethel ; it is the Bethel so long as the children stand or walk in the same old ways ; but these gone, all is gone. And well I may speak, for all my childhood was passed in such a Bethel ; I knew such prayers as were incense, such joys and hymns as were full of sweetest and most innocent life, and are to me now, only to recollect. It is much to come to the place and say, This is Bethel, the house of God. It is much to be born in Bethel ; “ those who are planted in the house of

the Lord ” ought to “ flourish in the courts of our God.” And it is a great thing to go on with Bethel worship through life, where heart and hand and voice all blend together, and where still, as of old, the name of Bethel is the proper and befitting designation for the place.

Bethel has come to be one of the most pathetic names of the Bible ; and its peculiar pathos grows out of, and is associated with, the days of its village life. There are few of us who have not associations with the pleasant and beautiful word Bethel, the house of God ; few Christian families in which the beautiful old Scottish hymn,

“ O God of Bethel, by whose hand
Thy people still are fed,
Who through this weary pilgrimage
Hast all our fathers led,”

has not been sung to the plaintive old Scotch tune “ Martyrdom.”

So, from the days of the patriarchs, we seem to mean by it any spot which has been the scene of Divine manifestations ; consecrated in their lives, and especially in the life of Jacob, a consecrating charm has gathered round it ever since. It was the scene of those wonderful night walks. And these night walks and visions give the striking point and interest to that text, “ He found him in Bethel, and there He spake to us.” *To us !* it is certainly a very singular way of putting it ; but those night visions of Bethel

in their extraordinary succession, illustrate that other text, "This shall be written for the generation following, and a people *that shall live* shall praise the Lord."* The Hebrews have a proverb, "What things befell the fathers are for a sign to the children;" and the deeds of the fathers are very often attributed to the children; as it is written, "They went through the flood on foot, there did *we* rejoice in Him." † So those night walks of Jacob at Bethel were times of great need, of sorrow, of great loneliness, darkness, and despair, times of great earnestness and prayerful tremulous ascent of soul. Bethel is thus to us, upon whom the ends of the world are come, one of the most significant spots in Scripture story; its scenery is alive with interests, both it and they seem to stand in more immediate relation to the personal life and experience of all succeeding believers, as that other text, "It is the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it"; ‡ each of those night walks is related to some personal incident in the life of the tried soul; every one has the refrain, "He found him in Bethel, and there He spake with us."

To Bethel came the youth, wearied and worn and anxious; not a good youth, I should think, in any sense. He was the deceiver, but pity him; he had foiled his brother, he has his father's blessing, but it does not seem to avail him yet; he is an outcast, an

* Psalm cii. 18.

† Psalm lvi. 6.

‡ Jeremiah xxx. 7.

exile ; he is anxious, he is punished. But beneath that crust of hardness and cruel worldliness there is a divine spark and nature ; God is at the foundation of his soul, he has a prophecy, and a communion. A nation was in him ; but at Bethel he was quite unconscious of the part he was to play in history. Meanings come when visions go—

“Tasks in hours of insight willed,
Through hours of gloom may be fulfilled.”

Have we not often thought of that scene, the night when he first slept beneath the palm-trees, his head resting on a stone, and called the name of that place Bethel? “He found him in Bethel.”

But twenty years rolled by, twenty years of trial ; he had become very wealthy, but it seems that God was forgotten in the home of his uncle ; in the accumulation of riches, beneath the smiles of his cousins, —his wives according to the usage of the times,—God was forgotten. He was returning, he was in the neighbourhood of Bethel again. We haunt some places ; singular it is, how, after long wanderings, men come back to some spot which seems a central point of life. Here he had another night vision, he was caught up to God in prayer, to the God of Bethel ; other lives, other interests hung upon his ; he “remembered God, and was troubled ;” then came the wrestling and what really seems the turning point in his life. “He found him in Bethel.”

Once again he came to Bethel. Ten years more had passed; life was not bright, after all; riches could not give happiness; he was in the midst of domestic sorrows and fears. I do not go beyond the probabilities of the story when I suppose this third Divine interview, like the others, was in the night, in the holy night, the time for the soul's free breathings. He was walking solitary and alone, then, and there again God met him, assuring him, and calling to his recollection the old Bethel days, and then rising up and leaving him, as we read, "God went up from him, in the place where He had talked with him." "He found him in Bethel."

Such are the night walks of Bethel when it was a lonely and sequestered place, probably not even a village, certainly not what it by-and-by became—a large and important town or city; and those night walks of the Patriarch give to it its most tender and abiding interest. Upon this spot despondency and aspiration had their conflict in the Patriarch's soul; here the night gave forth her strong oracles, uttered her prophetic murmurs; and here, too, the night was filled with music, and still to the ear of faith from its ancient isolations float wild but heavenly symphonies, voices of the night; its glorious mountain chains murmur with heavenly messages, and are mystical with the waving of dread wings, a piercing sweetness of melodies and harmonies which bid the heart to rise and fear not, choral strains and tones of faith

and love, the ministrations through many years to a human heart which suffered there, but came there to be refreshed and strengthened—to be found by God in Bethel.

How often we come back again upon a scene over which we passed twenty years since ; we find all the same,—what springs are touched by it!—some old house, some old church or chapel, some place of early self-communion. So he felt. And what is this marvellous spring ? And why is it that dead and inanimate and material things play upon us, even as if we were some harpstring or organ key ? Strange indeed is it, how dead things play upon living things ! What is this halo of association,—this which metaphysicians call the law of simple suggestion ? Why should a walk through an old field or over some well-known heath, or the sight of an old tree, make us start and weep ? What connection is there between the scent of a briar-hedge and a tare—between an old ruined wall and a troop of sorrowful thoughts ? How is it that thus the soul asserts its ever-present power of feeling ? Strange how, in the countless chambers of the brain, memories are lulled to slumber, from which a fragrance or a sound, a sight or a taste, can awaken them ! So, it seems, it was in these later night walks of Jacob. And notice, that as he came to every season of a Divine vision, it only preceded a time of trial and pain, apparently of desolation.

A pathetic story is associated with the last visit,

immediately after old Deborah died, the old nurse, the mother of the mothers, and they buried her beneath "the oak of weeping." How solemn look all these little domestic incidents sweeping up like spectres from the churchyards of such a remote and distant past, thousands of years ago! And Jacob went forth, musing on family interests; and only a day or two, and then the beloved Rachel was taken from him; and be very sure there swept through the heart of the disconsolate man the memory of all the tender words by the old well and the sheepfold in the Syrian desert. More pathetic story than that death there is scarcely any. What pathos in that expression, "For she died"! And, "as she was passing" the question and the name. How often has that scene been enacted since,—the mother's lost strength called up to give the name—Benoni!

Such were some of Jacob's night walks in the neighbourhood of Bethel. He seems to be constantly visiting that spot, and his life oscillates between those texts and Divine assurances, "I am the Lord, I will not leave thee *until* I have done that which I spoke to thee of." And then we read again, "And God went up from him in the place where He talked with him." They are great lessons of life which come to us from the Bethel haunts and days; and the two words in the text above shine out wonderfully—"until" and "*surely*"; every *until* has a *surely*. "I will *surely* do thee good."

Remote seems the *until*,—often far away. When shall I be there? says the wanderer; but God bridges over the time for us with these "*surelies*." All faith is a night walk; there is a moon; if not a moon, stars; if not stars, then there are torches and night companions; these are the reliefs and lights of the way. "*Surely* in the floods they shall not come nigh unto thee." "I will *surely* have mercy upon thee, saith the Lord." "They shall *surely* gather together, but not by me; every one shall fall for thy sake." Doubt says, How long shall this *until* last? When shall I be there? Faith says, "*Until* the day break and the shadows flee away." Such lessons come to us amidst these sudden absences, as when "God went up from Jacob in the place where He spake with him." But even then memory recalls visions, emotions, and impressions.

There is another side to the history of this place. Where is Bethel now; and what is Bethel now? What a dark night falls over its history! It is Bethel no longer. There came an idolatrous king—Jeroboam, a wicked and insane king.* Alas! too, how often in the household where the voice of prayer has ascended, and the simple and holy life has been led, there comes one of an insane Jeroboam-like generation, the worshipper of the calf! How wonderful, to forsake the worship of the God of heaven and

* 1 Kings xii. 29.

to bow down before a calf of the stall! Not more wonderful than many things we have seen and do see. And so all the people went after the calf. It was the wicked policy of the king to set up the calves in Bethel, because this place was on the highway to Jerusalem. Thus even the devout were intercepted in their progress to the worship of the true God, and allured to the degrading worship "of a beast having hoofs and horns." It became the very metropolis of idolatry. For a time the youthful Josiah* arrested the course of its iniquity, but not for long; and its groves and altars were thronged with worshippers of the cruel and debasing Astarte. And I know not that we have anywhere words of prophecy more tremendous than those hurled by Hosea and Amos against Bethel. Its very name was changed from Bethel, the house of God, to Bethaven, the house of vanity. "Bethel," said the Prophet Hosea, "shall come to nought." And it is remarkable that the very site was lost until a few years ago; and now it is recognised, not by its old and sacred name of Bethel, but Beitān, a corruption of its latter name, Bethaven, *i.e.*, nought.† It is a wilderness; it is a mere heap of ruins. One writer says he saw thorns and thistles waving among the ruins of the wild wind-girdled spot; and after he had left it he found in his Bible that these very things were written down there.‡

* 2 Kings xxiii. 15. † Amos v. 5, 6; vii. 13. ‡ Hosea x. 8.

And why all this? Because Bethel had been amazingly favoured; because the insanity was so wonderful which erected an altar to Moloch where Abraham erected his altar and called on the name of the Lord, which held those debasing rites where Jacob had his wonderful dream. So ever stupendous privileges, despised, bring stupendous judgments. Who can read these marvellous words, in which we find prophecy so wonderful becoming history, and fail to see how divinely gifted were those inspired seers? "Bethel is a thing of nought;" "a fruitful land is turned into barrenness;" "there the wild Arab pitches his tent;" the jackal prowls. So have I seen the wild fox leap through the ruined household room, where even once sweet domestic joys and household bliss were known. It is very remarkable that the Lord in His journeyings must often have passed through Bethel, but it is never once mentioned in His history.

"'And who art thou, that mournest me?' replied the ruin grey,
'And fearest not rather that thyself may prove a castaway?
I am a dried and abject branch; my place is given to thee;
But woe to every barren graft of thy wild olive-tree.
Our day of grace is sunk in night, our time of mercy spent,
For heavy was my children's crime, and strange their punishment;
Yet gaze not idly on our fall, but, sinner, warned be,
Who spared not His chosen place, may send His wrath on thee.'"

Such was Bethel in its royalty, and such is Bethel

in its ruin. Why, what lessons it preaches to us! How is it with me? Am I acting the part of Abraham or of Jeroboam? Am I maintaining the loyalty of the old Bethel household? Do I look up to the old heirlooms and say, "My Father, my Father, Thou shalt guide me by Thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory"? Do I believe? Have I a covenant? and have I a memorial? and have I visions? Or, alas! is it so that "I am changing," as Thomas Fuller quaintly says, "*Scala cæli*, the heavenly ladder, into *Gradus inferni*, steps to hell, and devils are dancing for joy where angels came down from heaven to earth"?

VI.

Villages in Goshen.

“And Pharaoh spake unto Joseph, saying, Thy father and thy brethren are come unto thee: the land of Egypt is before thee; in the best of the land make thy father and brethren to dwell; in the land of Goshen let them dwell: and if thou knowest any men of activity among them, then make them rulers over my cattle.”—GEN. xlvii. 5, 6.

WE have no very distinct information concerning the residence of the children of Israel in that region of Egypt called the “Land of Goshen.” This we know: it was the region to which Jacob and his family were invited by Joseph and Pharaoh; and it was the region in which we find them after upwards of four hundred years had passed away. It was the region at once of their settlement in that early period of prosperity which we may presume attended their first entrance into Egypt; and it was the region of their great persecution and their exodus. Some doubts of course remain as to the exact district; but it can be with sufficient certainty ascertained, defined, and described. Competent travellers leave us little ground for mistrust. It may be designated as the

Netherlands of Egypt. It seems certain, however, that when the first settlers rested there, it was not far from, probably in the immediate neighbourhood of, the court. There was On, the stately Heliopolis, where Joseph dwelt, and to which district also tradition assures us Joseph and Mary carried the infant Jesus—a vast, wide, flat, sweeping horizon, stretching everywhere before the eye, not far from the Pyramids and many other of the great, the stupendous structures, which seem to give to Egypt its marvellous and immortal fame—a region rich in its soil, and every way fitted to call forth and to encourage the labours of shepherds and agriculturists. We may be sure that the human Israelitish life there was a life of villages. The Egyptian Government, fearful of this people, even scattered abroad, would never have permitted them to gather and consolidate their strength in large towns; but they became sufficiently numerous,—upwards of two millions,—to be an occasion of fear to the nation. It was a region of coarse plenty, and presents to us a singular spectacle—a large tribe, or small nation, at last by superior strength enslaved and persecuted; not permitted to grow in wealth or power, nor can we doubt, persecuted chiefly on account of their faithful adherence, in the midst of much darkness, to the grand Hebrew faith of the unity of God and the simplicity of Divine service, in opposition to that wild delirium of idolatry which prevailed in every other part of the empire. That

period of the residence of the Israelites in Egypt may be regarded as the dark ages of the history of the early Church ; and it must fill any mind with wonder, that amidst such surrounding scenes of disgusting and degrading idolatry, in which every loathsome reptile became an object of worship,—amidst scenes, too, where rude strength attained its idea and its ideal in those colossal proportions whose mere fragments and ruins, as we behold them at this day, astonish us —amidst scenes of degrading idolatry and cruel power, —the Israelites retained some purity of faith, some singleness and elevation of religious principle and worship. Surely it reveals to us that continuity of purpose, by which a Divine principle has been kept alive in the world, like a “light shining in a dark place ;” like those rivers or streams of which we read, that they bear right on their way through some other lake or river, with whose waters they refuse to mingle although in the very midst of them. So, amidst all the fascinations of that singular and sensual people, even then “the people dwelt alone and were not reckoned amongst the nations ;” as if even then it had been written and said to them, “Ye are my witnesses, saith God, that I am the Lord.”

Egypt is one of the most solemn and sublime mysteries on the face of the earth ; the very study of Egypt is a science by itself : we call it Egyptology. When the Israelites were in Goshen, Egypt was in the fulness of its splendour, its strength, and its

idolatry. Those curious ruins we explore—Thebes and Karnac, where now only the silence of the unbroken wilderness reigns, where the wind wails through the places of tombs, dreadful in their crowded and ghostly desolation—were in the pride of their majesty; then the Memnonium was in all its glory,—

“And Time had not begun to overthrow
Those pillars, palaces, and piles stupendous,
Of which the very ruins are tremendous!”

The Israelites lived in the day when they were thronged and vital; but “the princes of Zoan have become fools,”—all has come to nought; “destroyed is the wisdom of the wise, brought to nothing is the understanding of the prudent.” Where are their wise men? Where are their scribes? To the world at the present day there is not a spot of that antique and hoary past so interesting as those scattered villages in Goshen, where the persecuted Hebrews were fanning and keeping alive the faint flame of a yet undying truth in the world. There was light in Goshen when “darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people,” all around them.

The condition of the Israelites in those times, the Goshen period of the Church, is probably very much like what has often been realized since, when truth and religion and spiritual freedom have been driven to the wilderness. Many ages and many places furnish us with illustrations. The persecuted will

usually band together and have their secret meetings and understandings and their sacred convocations. It seems, indeed, as if almost the last spark of nationality and self-respect had been trampled out, by their treatment of Moses; but the proverb says, "When the tale of bricks is too heavy, Moses comes." Their reception of him, however, was not very gracious. His soul was evidently all on fire with patriotic and spiritual instincts. In a grand manner he scorned the palace of the Pharaohs, and chose rather the afflictions of the obscure Hebrew village than such dignities as might have invested the grandson of the Emperor of Egypt. Little of this appears among the people; and he put his own life in jeopardy by striking down one who was ill-using a brother of the trampled Hebrew race. Long years of persecution and servility destroy the spirit of a people. He appeared, no doubt, in the dark night-time, when perhaps another generation or two would have extinguished the last sparks of the expiring flame. But he appeared, first of a long succession of princes, judges, and prophets, who were from time to time to rouse and restore the spirit of the people. They were all unfit to enter upon their inheritance in the Holy Land; but a generation of discipline and trial in the wilderness would equip them, kindle the flame of holy national enterprise within them, and make a people, who seemed only fit to be slaves, fit, from their small mountain territory, to throw the

sheen of their illustrious daring among the nations and kingdoms of the earth.

There are very few substantial legends preserved to us of the life of those villages of Goshen. One wonders where was their gathering-place, one wonders whether they spoke in hymns, whether they had any rites, whether they had any writings. Most likely it was all a word, a promise delivered on from age to age, a heaven-taught, a heaven-fed instinct. They had what their antediluvian fathers had; they had what Noah had, what Abraham had at Moreh and at Mamre, what Jacob had at Bethel; they had what Joseph had possessed before them in Egypt. Not vainly or superstitiously, they possessed in their midst sacred relics, holy dust, guarded with awful reverence—they possessed Joseph's bones, with which were associated a sacred promise, shining like a planet over his tomb. "I die, and God will surely visit you and bring you out of this land unto the land which He sware to Abraham." In the hearts of some of the more fervent of them, such memories and traditions would surely abide, and, if not flaming forth, would yet be like an ember, refusing to go out in darkness. Astonishing it is how often such sacred traditionary words and thoughts have been the rallying points of faith in a people, so often have the scattered tribes of the faithful been sustained. Perhaps their lot was something like the condition of those children of the Huguenots, scattered abroad in

lone little hamlets and desolate places over the deserts and *landes* of France. Thither persecuted Protestantism in France fled, and there,—a poor lost race, abandoned to the hardness of nature and the yet more dreadful cruelties of man,—some of the noblest spirits in France exercised at once their faith and their ministry. There was once a French pastor on trial for the crime of exercising his ministry. The question was put to him in what place he had baptized and administered the Communion; he answered, “In the open country, or in the desert.” Then the accused was called on to say what he meant by the word desert; the accused said, that he meant by the desert, lonely and uninhabited places where he assembled the faithful, sometimes in the neighbourhood of Alais, Sauve, etc., etc.* The history of the Church is full of such stories of the Waldenses and the dwellers in the valleys of Piedmont, and of the outlaws for the sake of truth and freedom in our own country and in Scotland. Piety and faith, under such circumstances, must have been sustained very much in the same way as among the villages in Egypt. Slight must have been the means of communication such people could have had with each other, and very scanty

* See a most interesting little volume, “The Pastor of the Desert and his Martyr Colleagues: Sketches of Paul Rabant. Translated from the French of M. Brider, Pasteur.”

their resources and means to aid the ordinances of faith. No printing-press to cheapen or scatter abroad the word either of revelation or encouragement. They fell back upon the loneliness of their own nature, and drank in strength not from external springs, but from Divine communion. Thus it must have been in Goshen. As yet no law had been given, no tabernacle ritual announced; there was no ephod, no urim or thummim, still less the visible wings of the covenanting cherubim shadowing the mercy-seat; no high priest or order of priests. And yet unquestionably the Divine truth of the personality, unity, and eternity of the Godhead was maintained, and sacrifice was offered as the mark and sign of propitiation. All this is unquestionable; throughout those hundreds of years, the unity of the truth was held, and at their close, when the people emerged from their state of bondage, they took up the ideas of Divine faith exactly as they had cheered the hearts of Abraham and Jacob in Hebron and Bethel, the long ages before. Let us admit that there is something very sublime, that there is even something distinctly miraculous, out of the ordinary course of nature, in such a spectacle. It is as if over a prostrate country two or three simple, essential, secret elements of truth had maintained their sway, without any external aid, on the contrary, with everything to crush and oppress and extinguish, say, from the time of Edward IV. to our own. There is,

perhaps, no greater miracle recorded in the Bible than this.

The introduction of the Israelites into Egypt had promised a very different course of treatment to that they received. Upon the first mention of his family by Joseph to Pharaoh, the king appears to have most gladly welcomed the probability of their settlement. The family of Jacob was pastoral; but "shepherds were an abomination to the Egyptians." The statement is connected with one of the great mysteries of what we understand to be the early period of Egyptian history. Who were the Hyksos, or the shepherd-kings, of whom we read in Manetho? From that dynasty certainly arose the "abomination" to which reference is made; but who were they? Were they the Israelites themselves? Have the stories become complicated? It seems certain that Pharaoh most gladly hailed the patriarchs: "The land of Egypt is before thee," said Pharaoh to Joseph; "in the best of the land make thy father and brethren to dwell, in the land of Goshen let them dwell." It was, as Dr. Cooke Taylor* remarks, no act of romantic generosity on the part of the reigning Pharaoh; it was an act of wise policy, and it probably resulted from the abomination of pastoral life entertained by the Egyptians. Goshen was indeed what the great region proclaims

* "The Natural History of Society." By W. Cooke Taylor, LL.D.
See chapter on Egyptian civilization.

itself to be to-day—a rich pastoral country; but its pastures were neglected and unprofitable. Prejudice prevailed against the region and the pursuits which such a region suggested; besides which, it was a frontier land, an exposed province. Not far off, even in those times, the wild Arab pitched his tent; and in addition to the distaste felt for the shepherd's employment, there was the danger of wild border raids, to repel which is not always easy to one of the shepherd's profession. To the need of such strong military service, blended with the pastoral, Pharaoh alludes when he says to Joseph concerning his family, "And if thou knowest any men of activity among them, then make them rulers over my cattle." Thus it seems they added a large, powerful, territorial district to the frontier land—the great border-land of Egypt. From Egypt itself being exposed to incursion, it would seem the Israelites themselves became invaders, and carried the raid and war into the enemy's country. There is just one passage in Scripture which refers to this; it is a reference to the grandsons of Joseph, the two descendants of Ephraim: "And Zabad his son, and Shuthelah his son, and Ezer and Elead, whom the men of Gath that were born in that land slew, because they came down to take away their cattle."*

Such was Goshen, given as a possession to the

* 1 Chron. vii. 21.

early Israelites, and such were they there. In truth a beautiful, fruitful region, and well called "the best of the land." There the wondrous river, so ancient, sacred, and marvellous, rolled in its lonely grandeur—the mighty Nile, fed from the clouds of heaven and the mighty Abyssinian hills. Goshen formed, or was greatly formed from, the Delta of that wonderful flood. Probably the gorgeous skies of that region present almost the only absolutely unchanged aspect of the whole scene. Even the tall tufted palms which still rise in groves on either side the river, throwing their umbrella-shaped shadows over the low flat-roofed huts of sun-dried mud—even these are perhaps not so plentiful as in that old time. The Israelites saw the famous paper-plant of Egypt growing ; but, as it is written, "The waters have failed from the sea, and the river is wasted and dried, the brooks of defence are empty, and the reeds and flags are withered, the paper reeds by the brooks are withered, are driven away, and are no more." When the Israelites were in Goshen, flocks of the sacred ibis haunted the banks of the river ; it was a hallowed bird, for it was supposed to rid the country of serpents ; and the dead bodies of princes or of priests were not more sacredly wrapped in the mummy-cloth and deposited in the tomb, than the ibis. Their remains are found in altogether countless numbers in the ibis mummy-pits at this day. But the ibis no longer lives in Egypt, as the author of "Nozrani" says, "As the men no longer

dig the pools, the snakes no longer bite the men, and the birds no longer eat the snakes." The vast lakes of the desert are dried up, and the bird has winged its way to the southern wilds of Ethiopia. The whole aspect of the country is changed. Many reptiles abound still ; when the Israelites were there, numbers of them were worshipped by their strange oppressors. The owl hoots among the ruins, and by the river banks some birds flash their white wings over the waters, else the whole scene is changed, transformed. But it was an enviable region when first delivered to the Hebrew settlers ; it had all the rich abundance which could belong to the valley of the Nile ; at the same time it was in close proximity to the desert, into which the Israelites could drive their flocks for pasture. Travellers now remark upon the singular nearness of verdant fields and the unreclaimed wilderness. Thus, however, it is, and strange it is to say it, as Dean Stanley remarks, during the period of Israel's settlement in Goshen, "Egypt became the Holy Land:" that especial neighbourhood, as we have already observed, there is every reason for regarding as the most important department of Egypt. Helio-
polis, says the writer we have just quoted, was the Oxford of ancient Egypt, the seat of its learning in the ancient times ; there the Pharaohs dwelt, and Goshen was called the Land of Rameses. What gigantic splendours heave up all around ! Ancient tradition long assigned to the years of Israelitish

oppression the erection of the pyramids, and other such monuments of kings, who thus made "desolate places for themselves." A distinguished and eloquent writer has wished for a fairy gift,—a great winnowing-fan, such as would, without injury to human eyes and lungs, blow away the sand which buries the monuments of Egypt. What treasures and marvels of antiquity lie entombed there ! What a scene would be laid open ! One statue and sarcophagus brought from Memphis was buried one hundred and thirty feet below the mound. And this is the scene in the midst of which stood the low villages of the Hebrews,—amidst those armies of sphinxes and ranks of colossal sentries, guarding the mighty river—amidst quays, terraces, and temples on every hand ; there, beneath the jealous eyes of their hard, suspicious task-masters, the Hebrews pursued their cruel toils. All these circumstances bring out with more distinctness the singular isolation of this peculiar people. Our museums, if not our travels, familiarize our minds with those aspects of calm but cruel and invincible despotism—those colossal figures of the Pharaohs which in that day guarded the entrance of every temple ; and that despotism must no doubt have intensified that strong republican energy which perpetually flashed forth in the history of Israel, which through ages, during the dominion of the judges, confirmed the constitution given by God, and which ever and anon blazed forth even through the reigns of their kings.

Why were they permitted to sink so low? God's own peculiar people, "witnesses for God," why were they permitted to sink beneath such oppression? And why were they permitted to know such moral degradation as that to which they no doubt sank? For, as it has been pointed out, they were constantly and directly charged with participation in the idolatry of Egypt: "Your fathers served other gods in Egypt; they forsook not the idols of Egypt." Brought up into the wilderness on their way to nationality and independence, they clung with all the degraded feelings of a most servile people to the old days in the Nile valley,—“to the flesh-pots, and melons, and cucumbers, and onions, and garlic.” They indulged in satire: “Were there no graves in Egypt?” The region from whence they came was especially a place of tombs; the impression of the solemn host of tombs is one of the most overwhelming to travellers now; it was in satire, therefore, that they inquired, “Were there no graves in Egypt, that thou hast brought us up to die in the wilderness?” Indeed, in this very neighbourhood are the long ranges of mounds still called the graves of the Jews; and although Dr. Robinson quite summarily dismisses the idea of any veracity in the ascription, it may be regarded as one of those links of tradition which identifies them with the spot. They were degraded and persecuted, yet still they grew. Persecution has very seldom succeeded in staying the numerical

growth of a people : as seldom has it alone succeeded in annihilating a creed or an opinion. Still they grew ; their conquerors might far exceed them in numbers, still they could not overcome their fears. The Hebrews were in their midst,—another race. Perhaps the gradual decay of the grander and more sublime elements of their faith might tend rather to the setting free a dangerous savageness of disposition and determination. Somehow they must be extinguished ; and then the order went forth to the midwives who attended the Hebrew women, that every male child should be destroyed. Surely it looks like an immediate nemesis of judgment, that while the design of the tyrant was frustrated by the faithfulness of the Hebrew women, the last great judgment which scared by its tremendous and overwhelming horror the already affrighted land, was the death of the first-born in every Egyptian home.

Tradition has woven very tender memories round the Hebrew women in those desolate villages. It is said they were the chief stay and staff of their exhausted husbands, guarding and providing for their necessities, and seeking to relieve and strengthen them while they slept, exhausted from their toils, and visiting them with food while they laboured in the fields.* And certainly the race which owed its sal-

* See Baring Gould's "Legends of Old Testament Characters, from the Talmud and other Sources," vol. ii. pp. 66, 67.

vation to the sister of Moses deserves such a tradition. Evidently it must have been in some village on, or not far from, the banks of the great river, amidst its group of low mud huts, that deliverance was born.

The tribe to which this cottage belonged is identified ; it was of the tribe of Levi. In their prostration, then, we find each tribe preserved its individuality and ancestral relations. Yet this was scarcely the tribe from which deliverance would humanly have been expected. Its origin, and the looming words which hung over its destiny, pronounced by Jacob when he was dying, would not seem to have given the promise of the production of a great deliverer. Yet through it deliverance came ; in that village lived Amram and Jochebed. It seems impossible to resist the conviction that, however faith might falter and faint, and the old Divine institutions languish in other tribes and amongst other huts and villages, they retained a stronger hold and influence there. Let us think that the old signs of the Abrahamic faith lingered there ; that God's great institution of the Sabbath was known ; that the rite of circumcision—that hated rite, but the mark of the early Church, like the sign of baptism in the later days—was administered ; that a fearful, tender, holy piety not only filled the single hut, but shed itself from thence through the lone village. Miriam and Aaron were sometimes weak in after years ; but it is natural to believe that a household from whence emanated such leaders, and

especially the woman who, amidst the cymbals of the daughters of Israel, struck up that triumphant strain in after years upon the shores of the Red Sea, must have been nobler than the average of Hebrew households.

But another child was expected in the little hut; and it was in Israel's very darkest hour: it was exactly at the moment when the edict had gone forth for the destruction of every man child—"Every son that is born you shall cast into the river," said Pharaoh to the midwives. What fears, what pains to add to the birthtime and to the mother's agonies: what loud outcries against cruel Egypt: what cries to God, that He would "avenge His own elect"! All this was felt by this household in this poor cottage on the Nile. At last the hour comes, and a child is born,—and it is a boy! Doomed to the waters! Oh, can it be saved? For three months the little creature was hidden somehow, three months of terror to a mother's heart, to a father's anxieties, often tearfully meditating how better indeed it were that the little one should die than be spared for the brutality of the Egyptian and the brick-fields of Zoan. Then, when something must be done, what? Affection has many inventions and much faith, but it seemed a very dreadful and doubtful risk; tender sisterly eyes watched the little ark amidst the bulrushes,—perhaps, as bathers were wont to frequent that spot, supposed to be safe from the jaws of the

crocodile. But what innumerable dangers hovered round! We need not pursue the story; the close and consummation are well known: how the little creature, born in the low Hebrew village, became, by one of those singular transformations, so called, of fortune,—in this case eminently of Providence,—child of the court; how soon the best marks of the finest Hebrew blood shone forth in him; how the young villager chose rather to exile himself away to the stern mountains and upland pasturages, than to lounge a thoughtless Sybarite amidst the courts of his country's foes; how his quick mind, rapidly accumulating all the manifold lore of that learned nation and age, came to a grand decision, choosing rather to fly to the wilderness with God than worship at the shrines of Osiris, Apis, Isis, or those grotesque hawk-headed monsters, or those cruel feline Sphinxes whose terrible countenances lowered round him in mountains of granite and stone. So from a village, no doubt, and that an oppressed and degraded one, came forth the man whose voice was to be deliverance, who was to lead forth two millions of people from slavery to conquest and to royalty; who was to achieve, as a Divine instrument, the work of the first lawgiver the world has ever known; the shadow of whose immense fame was to be immortal and coeval with all the ages; in whose mind were to be gathered up all the authentic traditions of creation, of the antediluvian world, and the divine succession of

Church life ; compiler of the Pentateuch, most likely the author of the Book of Job, written amidst the solitudes of Midian and the still retreats of Horeb, when as a shepherd, in villages there, " he kept the flocks of Jethro his father-in-law." Lawgivers and princes of larger empires there have been ; but not one ever dared more bravely, none ever had so difficult a task to perform, none ever accomplished it so successfully and well, none ever was permitted to frame so marvellous a code, in which, if for a savage people, there are traces of a sternness which often repels, there is a holiness and purity—a law not only of justice but of generosity, of sacred regard to the sanctity and the rights of man, conjoined to a ritual sublime in its spirituality, gleaming out with every light and every tone of colour and music, beautiful and terrible, and so charmingly and fearfully mystical, that through all ages since, studious eyes have attempted to expound and to explore its symbolism, and feel that every effort made to comprehend, still leaves in its secret recesses depths of mystery unfathomed and Divine.

Such were the villages of Goshen, and such were the results which came about from the residence of the Church in them. Thus was fulfilled in the earlier as well as in the later day, the proverb and the prophecy, " Out of Egypt have I called my son." The continuity and succession of Church life is incomplete without the study of the villages of

Goshen ; they illustrate the mysterious path of Divine purposes. Without that residence in Goshen we cannot very well see how Israel could have inherited its Holy Land ; for Israel was not to be like Ishmael, a mere horde of bandit warriors, or a wandering race of unsettled and savage Bedouins. The race was to exist for a purpose on the earth ; amidst its hills it was to be a city not to be hid, even when its people should be scattered over the face of the earth. Much is given to a race beyond that which seems to be given : a spirit would infiltrate itself into the vast multitudes, from the years of the discipline of despotism ; a mind, a Hebrew mind, would be born, fostered, and transmitted. Such is history : the soul of the man abides, though men depart ; something is created and carried on. And more : it is to the villages of Goshen believers may turn to find how, when circumstances look most hopeless and men are most helpless, they are not forgotten or forsaken of God ; how, in the deep night-time of a nation's distress, and amidst the most bewildering follies of superstition assisted by science, the lamp of truth may somewhere be burning brightly ; and how, in the darkest night, a sudden and unexpected fulfilment of prophecies long delayed may appear, to gladden a nation's heart and bid it start forth afresh upon some enterprise greater than it had dared to hope or dream. Such lessons come to us from the villages of Goshen.

And yet one other lesson. There was *safety* in

Goshen. There came a time when God in a very fearful manner arose for the deliverance of His Church. By the mouth of Moses He demanded that His people should go forth free; and then were unloosed in succession the spirits of all the elements, and then exactly the very things Egypt worshipped became fraught with death. It was as if a voice of mockery and scoffing cruelty arose from the shrines before which they adored; but at the very outset of the conflict God had said, "I will sever in that day the land of Goshen, in which my people dwell, that no evil shall be there; that thou mayest know that I am the Lord in the midst of the earth. And I will put a division between my people and thy people." And the hail-storm fell over Egypt, but while "it smote man and beast and every herb of the field, and brake every tree of the field, only in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel were, was there no hail." And the darkness came thick—Egyptian darkness—darkness that might be felt. They saw not one another, "but all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings." And then went forth the last dreadful decree, and the first-born throughout the land of Egypt died. At midnight all the first-born, from the palace of Pharaoh to the first-born of the captive in the dungeon, died, and there was a great cry in Egypt; but Israel was safe—

"The poisoned air
Was pure, for Israel's God was there."

VII.

Beth-horon, the Village of the Great Battle.

"And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man."—JOSHUA x. 14.

THE great conflicts of nations and peoples usually come before a village to have themselves decided. Villages usually present to us, therefore, the spots of the great decisive battles of the world; the great masters of battle-paintings, whether on the canvas or the page, remind us of this. The history of our country is full of such spots; they come up along the whole line of our history through the periods of our various civil wars: even the battle-field which derives its name from the larger town, like Tewkesbury or Worcester, was not fought there, but in the villages and hamlets around it. Very often the drift of the battle has stirred up some village, like Marston-in-the-Moors, like Naseby, and given a place and a page immortally in history to some obscure site which would otherwise have remained for ever unknown. How many of the great fights of Europe derive their

so-called magnificent names from villages!—a village where through long ages had only gone on the day of toil and the night of the labourer's rest, suddenly snatched forth, like a jewel from the dark, to bind the brow of a conqueror with its name, and to give the decoration to the coronet of a duke or the baton of a marshal! Thus in the history of the world, villages, so far as war has affected its pathway, light up the line of story.

It is so in the history of the Bible : the battle-fields of the Bible furnish a succession of grand and touching historical paintings ; but there is remarkable distinctness about one. The battle of Beth-horon suggests every way the story of one of the most significant battle-fields of the Israelites, one of the most decisive battles of Hebrew story ; and not to dwell upon others, we may be sure the world is interested as deeply in this as in those on the old fields of Marathon or Pharsalia, or on the seas of Salamis. Are we interested in the great Punic wars, in the victories or defeats of Hannibal, in the rise or falls of Carthage ? But surely we have gained more by the battle-fields of the Bible than by any of those of profane story. Dean Stanley in his graphic pictures of Palestine has sketched with great distinctness the ground and the conflict ; but we may very naturally dwell for a little while upon the story, for there are some very singular points in it, and it brings into singular relief a rugged piece of scenery from the heights and passes of

Benjamin. And then the battle-field has this singular characteristic attached to it,—that there was no other field like it, in which God so remarkably “hearkened to the voice of a man. To the Jews through all their history, no doubt, there was no battle like it—field perhaps it could scarcely be called ; for it was the conflict which gave them their settlement in the Holy Land : and considering all that came out of the settlement and consolidation of the Hebrews in Palestine, we may call this, too, one of the decisive battles of the world, and we may wonder that it has not excited more attention.

There were two Beth-horons, the upper and the lower,—the village on the heights, the village in the valley ; they formed the extreme points of a grim mountain-pass, a sort of Israelitish Glencoe or Kirkstone, sufficiently central to be in the neighbourhood and to furnish a kind of rallying-point for the five kings or chiefs of the Amorites, who gathered there among those wild hills the whole forces of Southern Palestine. Five kings or chiefs of the tribes of the mountains and the plains : the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon—two of them rulers of the chief cities of the whole country—they gathered themselves together, and went up, and encamped themselves with all their hosts before Gibeon. These kings of these five districts seemed to have been cast into a dead sleep hitherto ; the reports of

these strange Red Sea wanderers, who had settled themselves in Palestine by a succession of famous conquests, had not produced on their minds the same impression as on the mountain dwellers of Gibeon; even the fall of Jericho had not produced the effect of awakening them out of their sleep; and when with remarkable subtlety the men of Gibeon made what may be considered a timid and inglorious peace, at the call of Adoni-zedec, the king of Jerusalem (that is, singularly, the same as Melchisedec), they gathered themselves together to besiege and to punish the inhabitants of Gibeon: "when Adoni-zedec, king of Jerusalem, had heard how Joshua had taken Ai, and had utterly destroyed it, he went to the kings, saying, Come up unto me, and help me, that we may smite Gibeon; for it hath made peace with Joshua and with the children of Israel. And the men of Gibeon sent unto Joshua to the camp of Gilgal, saying, Slack not thy hand from thy servants; come up to us quickly, and save us, and help us; for all the kings of the Amorites that dwell in the mountains have gathered themselves together against us." Evidently it was a great blow which was to be struck; this was to be a decisive battle. When the call came to Joshua, there was no time for an instant of delay, and not a moment was lost by the swift commander; by a forced march he came upon them and discomfited them with a great slaughter; he pursued them along and down the steep pass: if there were pauses in the conflict the

victory never wavered. It is doubtful if there were then the two villages: probably not, as mentioned in 1 Chronicles vii. 24. They seem afterwards to have arisen, probably as monuments erected by the granddaughter of Joshua, of whom we read, "And his daughter was Sherah, who built Beth-horon the nether, and the upper, and Uzzen-sherah." However that may be, these two villages retain their names to the present day, as mentioned by Robinson Beit'ûr; they are distant from each other about three miles, and the upper to the lower follows a steep pass along the ridge, "now rugged as lava, now flat and smooth as the pavements of a London street;" so they continue to this day. Along this ridge the "kings of the armies fled apace"; but as if not sufficiently discomfited already by the sudden stroke of the Israelitish commander, there broke over the flying, in the midst of their mad scattering and flight, one of those tremendous storms which have often decided the issue of great battle-fields; the five kings were lost before, but now the heavens were black with the tempest. We may conceive the hurricane and the wild uproar of the storm; huge hailstones fell, like those often seen in the lands of Palestine: "The Lord discomfited them before Israel. And it came to pass as they fled, and were in the going down to Beth-horon, that the Lord cast down great stones from heaven upon them, and they died; there were more that died with hailstones than they whom the children

of Israel slew with the sword." It was night when the rout and flight began : " Joshua came unto them suddenly, and went up from Gilgal all night." Before the commander, as he reached the heights of Beth-horon the upper, were the flying hosts, beneath him there lay stretched out the long, sweet valley of Ajalon, the valley of the gazelles ; but upon the heights overhead flared up the sun, and yonder over the valley rose the crescent moon. There we conceive the warrior pausing, and, by the strong impulse of faith, stretching out his spear and exclaiming, " Sun, stand thou still on Gibeon, thou moon in the valley of Ajalon, till the work be done." To the mind of the commander this seemed as a providence not to be allowed to pass away with the occasion ; he seized with swiftness the flying advantage. Quite a prompt and nimble commander he,—not one to let occasion slip from him ; he had marched all the night, he now prepared to fight all the day. It is impossible to fail to remember at this point Cromwell at Dunbar, when in the early morning the red sun looked up over Abb's Head, and saw the flying host retreating before his arms. As he looked upon them, his grey hairs streaming in the wind, (his helmet had fallen from his head,) he exclaimed, " They run ! I declare they run ! " then, stretching out his baton to the sun, " Now let God arise, let His enemies be scattered ! " The fit of martial enthusiasm—the fit and the moment—are exceedingly like the attitude of

Joshua in the early morning in the wild pass of Beth-horon.

We cannot dwell at any length upon this stupendous miracle. Dean Stanley has, in the first volume of his "History of the Jewish Church," described the scenery of the battle, and discussed all the mental and moral difficulties of the story. Faith indeed says, Is anything too hard for God? but whether we adhere to the passionate descriptions of poetry, in which the events of a magnificently memorable day are sublimely described, or whether there were some miraculous optical effect, or whether really the sun and moon stood still in their habitations, while the people moved on in the shining of God's glittering spear, we need not stay to inquire; only certainly we have here one of the grand achievements of faith and holy heroism very animating to the heart; the nation never forgot it: it was a great national day; it greatly consolidated the dominion and the kingdom of the Hebrews. Those five kings had made a woful mistake and miscalculation; they were literally run to earth like foxes: "These five kings fled, and hid themselves in a cave at Makkedah; and Joshua rolled great stones upon the mouth of the cave, and set men by it for to keep them;" and after the conflict was entirely over—towards the evening, when the sun was going down—Joshua said, "Open the mouth of the cave, and bring out those five kings unto me out of the cave;" and then he hanged them on five trees; and as

the sun went down they took them down off the trees, and cast them into the cave where they had been hid, and laid great stones in the cave's mouth, which remain until this very day." So this was their mausoleum. A very grim person this Joshua—very swift, and one thinks somewhat savage; he also had a wild and savage tribe of Amorites round him, who were not to be gently entreated. This was the issue of the battle of Beth-horon; it wrote itself indelibly on the passionate and patriotic memory, imagination, and devotion of the Hebrew; and it seemed "there was no day like that, before or after it, that the Lord hearkened to the voice of a man."

There are great moments in the lives of nations and men when the Lord hearkens to the voice of a man; many a great battle-field the world has known which has been the turning place and spot in the history of mankind; indeed, there have been moments, which still seem somewhat incomprehensible to us, when it appears that God has not hearkened. A devout mind even finds it difficult to believe it was right that Gustavus Adolphus should fall at Lutzen; it seems as if it would have been a different kind of Europe had he been permitted to step on to Vienna and dictate terms there. Protestantism, which is really the cause of man, and freedom, and God, has never recovered that blow in Europe, so it seems. The success of Wallenstein seems like the triumph of Adoni-zedec over Joshua; and as we listen to the clamour of the

bells at Vienna and the illuminations and thunder-chanting *Te Deums* at Rome, it all sounds like the very hiss with which the snaky demons in Pandemonium received and applauded the returning lost archangel. But many a village and many a moment gives a revelation like that of Beth-horon, when even through some discomfiture and defeat a Divine cause has marched on to a victory for the truth. It is the long run which marks all: what is gained in the end? However, in the great battle-fields of the world the race is gained, in the old history and in the new, in the distant times and in our own more modern ages. Our best sympathies all go with Hannibal, but the world would have lost if Hannibal had gained. The story of the world is full of such instances; they are the distinctly-cut milestones on the way of the progress of mankind; and there are such spots upon which we behold the great purpose of faith for the accomplishment of some mighty end; the arms of evil have been turned back, as in the arrest of the Mohammedan arms at Tours. We should collect such instances, and while we study them we shall read the same lesson as from this Bible aspect of village life at Beth-horon; we shall discover how the race has gained by some grand exhibition of rugged individuality and earnest faith, and feel as they felt who said, "There was no day like that, in which the Lord hearkened to the voice of a man."

This story of Beth-horon has always been a per-

plexity ; evidently the Hebrew believed that there is a great and marvellous doctrine in it ; and it is the death-knell of all cold Rationalism and unbelief, if the Lord can hearken to the voice of a man. This is one of the mighty records of faith ; it reiterates the old consolation, that the Lord hearkens and hears. We stand in amazement that a voice like that of the brave Jewish commander could avail to touch the sun and the moon ; but prayer believes that it achieves this always ; it touches the power which moves the sun and moon—bids them move on their way or stand still. This is the stupendous power of prayer ; this is the definition of prayer. We do not always behold in striking diagrams, in scrolls of light in the heavenly places, the response to our prayer ; but this is the doctrine of the Book,—“the Lord inclined His ear unto *me* and heard *me*.”

It is wrought very deeply into some hearts as an experience, this testimony of the text, “there was no day like that.” There are certain great names which stand out as mighty in prayer, or rather in that strong faith which is the nerve-spirit, the nerve-force of every prayer ; men like those of whom the apostle sings his triumphant song, “men who through faith subdued kingdoms.” A mistake we often make is in the foolish thought that faith is to be exercised when in fact there is nothing to exercise it upon ; as if Joshua had no fainting warriors around him, no fighting foes. No ; great faith stands its ground in imme-

diate relation to mighty difficulties, mighty foes ; we associate the mighty faith and great strength with difficulties which threatened to overwhelm, but to which they were found to be equal.

And is there not another aspect from which I may look at the battle in this old Canaanite village ? What, then, is the sacred ground of all ? We may surely rest for a moment here ; for there are some of us who like to read the Scriptures beneath sacred parabolic lights, in the spirit of sacred analogies. " And what have we here, and whom have we here ? " Joshua, who led the tribes into rest ; Joshua and Jesus both the same word, " God my Salvation." There was no day like that when the Lord hearkened to the voice of that man ; of all miracles, this of Joshua's was the most stupendous ; rather say, of all miracles highest of all is He " who cried, and was heard in that He feared." We may see Him toiling up the steep Beth-horon of Calvary, there where the sun was darkened and stood still again in his habitation ; and then, amidst the panic of a world of defeated spirits, descending into the Beth-horon (the House in the Hollow) of the grave, while hell and death astonished flee before the mighty Prince. " Now know I that the Lord saveth His anointed ; He will hear Him from His holy heaven, with the saving strength of His right hand." It is impossible to resist this aspect of the Divine and sacred analogy of the upper and the nether Beth-horon ; the names the

same, the foes the same, the work the same. And now He is in the holy place ; and if our faith be true, true it is "there was no day like that, before or after, when the Lord hearkened to the voice of a man."

Be this the consummation of our story ; for us the true point of view, the aspect of the lesson and doctrine of faith. Be this as a motto on the banner of our belief beneath the story of life. Or seems life to us one long, unanswered prayer ? No answered prayer !—the great impossibility has never been wrought for us. We know of no flying foes ; the sun has never stood still while we have obtained our desire against those who have risen up against us. On the other hand, there are those who feel that they have been heard, that the Lord has wrought for them even a great sensible deliverance sometimes—always a victory ; so that even here on earth some can say what heaven at last shall attest : "There was no day like that when the Lord hearkened to the voice of a man."

VIII.

Village Preachers in the Wilderness.

“But there remained two of the men in the camp ; the name of the one was Eldad and the name of the other Medad : and the Spirit rested upon them ; and they were of them that were written, but went not out unto the tabernacle, and they prophesied in the camp.”—NUMBERS xi. 26.

THE progress of Israel through the wilderness we know to have been circuitous ; a journey we should perform in a few days took them, beneath their Divine leadership, forty years. All this time the people were in training and discipline. We may believe that they retained the main principles of patriarchal tradition and worship ; but it must have been a degraded mass which set forth out of Egypt. Consumed by oppression ; spirits depressed and crushed by slavery ; utterly abandoned to poverty by the circumstances of their lot, it must have been a miserable and hopeless horde which set forth from Egypt. Throughout the whole way, then, we are not surprised at the frequent wild plunges of ignorance, mad self-will, and all that constituted the feebleness

of a young and helpless people. And is it not very remarkable to think of such a wild mass of chaotic human material reduced to order and held within the reins of subjecting power by one man ?

As to the region through which they travelled evidence seems certain that it was not what we behold it to-day : as we well know in how many other regions nature has decayed and become withered and barren, where once the most ample illustrations of fertility were seen ; so, in the regions through which the millions of the Israelites passed, it was not all, far from being all, a desert soil ; there were places of eminent beauty and fruitfulness, such as Elim, where "there were twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm-trees." Truly a pleasant spot ; a well of water for each tribe, and palm-trees for cooling shade and pleasant fruit. Alighting on such spots, they pitched their camp, they spread out the separate tribes into scattered villages ; they no doubt must have cultivated the soil and have won the results of the harvest as they passed along. And, of course, under such circumstances the education of the people in some sense went on, but heavy and weighty fell the burden of power and responsibility upon the shoulders of the great prophet and lawgiver, Moses. He sank exhausted with the toil : the people were singularly indocile and unbelieving ; and mighty must have been the difficulties of the statesman in ordering and arranging the demands of the mighty camp.

Like many another worn-out captain since, he cried to God,—the labours were too overwhelming for him. Then said God, "Gather to thee seventy helpers." And the helpers were gathered ; but over and above these there were *two*, who, while the seventy were gathered together, stayed behind, moved by the spectacle of the camp, by its unbelief, by its bitter need, by affection for their leader ; they stayed behind and prophesied. And presently perhaps we may inquire a little what that possibly means. Eldad and Medad by name ; of course they were not to exercise their gift without exciting in many of their fellow-wanderers wonder, anger, amazement, jealousy ; "they prophesied," they spoke to the people, they sought to move the people, and they did not seek in vain, we have reason to believe. Even in that day we know how free the Spirit of God was ; we know it had its own pathway of operation, how it moved in bosoms and hearts by the force of its own law. The most venerable of the patriarchs were illustrations of this ; and Moses himself, strangely called by the Spirit of God, knew how to distinguish the apparent exceptional act from the invariable law, and recognised the principle by which the Divine Spirit moved over souls ; and when one said, "My lord Moses forbid them !" he exclaimed, Not so : am I able to despise any labour, throw any genuine worth away, repress any well-meant effort ? Is there so much belief among us that I can afford to quench fervour

and ardour? No: "would that all the Lord's people were prophets!" It is a fine sanction, even for erratic enthusiasm, when governed by principle and "sanctified by the word of God and prayer."

There are two methods of doing good—the ordinary and the extraordinary. I fancy it is in the nature of our mind to think more of the last than the first, even while we affect to sneer at it. And yet we should not appraise the one more highly than the other; the unusual, affects and moves us, the usual, however admirable and sublime, appears tame to us. It seems to us a wonderful thing to live in a kingdom of miracles; but if we did so, the kingdom of miracle would soon sink to the kingdom of commonplace. As one has said, if the stars came out once in a thousand years, what wonder they would create as they drifted into sight across the ocean of space; but we see them every night, and so think nothing of them, and impudently we go through the world, asking, Why does not God work miracles? He works myriads of miracles every moment. One miracle is a planet, another a comet; but there is as true a miracle in a budding leaf, or in a growing child, as in the raising of the dead, or the restoration of sight to the blind.

Ordinary and extraordinary good—that is the difference between rivers and rains, and dew and lightning. We must believe that the unusual is the most worthy of remark, and the most unobtrusive the most insignificant. God's ministry goes on not only

by the flowing river but by the trickling dew ; the Severn and the Wye roll their beautiful courses by the meadow ; and by the hill-side ; but if they did not give their waters to the sun and the cloud, and fall back upon the earth again in showers and dews, they would cease from their channels among the hills, and leave only a parched and desert plain. And so also in the whole work of the Divine life there is the ordinary and the extraordinary, the river and the dew ; and, indeed, in the scheme of natural means they are both ordinary. And in the work of the Church there is room for erratic as well as orderly spirits ; and when under Divine influence, the erratic is really as orderly as the regular,—perhaps more so ; and so abnormal action at last becomes part of a normal system of means. For—

[I.] *What and who is a prophet ?* Think of the character of a prophet ; it perhaps differs now from that of old, still we are told by the apostle to desire especially “to prophesy” : and what is that faculty ? what does it intend ? It intends that rare power, but given eminently to some men, to speak to souls,—the most exalted power men can possess. It is the power of the poet, it is the power of the orator, but it may also be the power of the humblest and simplest teacher. To drop words—comfortable, cheerful, and convincing words ; words of spirit and of life, revealing words, life-giving words, feeding words ; to do good by speech : this seems to me to be a great characteristic

of the prophet. To do good by the tongue ; in the chapel, in the prayer-meeting, the class-meeting, in any way, anywhere. What then was it to be a prophet? It was, in one word, to speak for God, to speak as before God ; to sing was to prophesy (1 Samuel x. 5-6), to speak was to prophesy, to work miracles was to prophesy. I have no doubt that we have far too many who emulate the gifts of the speaker, who never felt "a call." Oh sacred word ! however it may have been satirized and consigned to the limbo of cant. Oh sacred word ! "the word of the Lord as a fire in the bones." How few have felt it : but no man is a prophet who has not felt it. Then how hard the preacher's task, how lamely and limpingly, and feverishly and fretfully, the work is performed ! And all sorts of false motives and stimulants are taken. Oh ! better a thousandfold the rough earnestness of Eldad and Medad, than "the strange fire" of Nadab and Abihu at the altar ! But in the character of the prophet there were especially two features, both marked in the text.

1. *The first was personal.* And I suppose that, on the whole, a man's public relations are influenced by, and are the result of, his personal character. First, "*the Spirit rested on them.*" We have no reason to expect that there will be any power or any energy of useful character in the world in the long run, save as the Spirit rests on the prophets. It is the Spirit which calls, consecrates, dedicates, crowns ; it is the charac-

ter of the Spirit, and the degree of the Spirit, which determines a man's work. You talk of the inspiration of men; well, from a human standpoint you may speak of them as inspired. Genius is inspiration. Shakespeare was inspired: that is, all the power of nature, the force of nature, blew through him and descended upon him. Passion is inspiration; nay, even wisdom, worldly wisdom, prudence, is inspiration; but I speak of the inspiration of the Holy Power, the descent of Divine energy on and into the soul. There is the inspiration from beneath, which is infernal; there is the inspiration from around, which is genial and emotional; there is the inspiration from above, which is Divine and prophetic. "No man can call Jesus, Christ, but by the Holy Ghost," no man can do a work for Christ really, but by the Holy Ghost; so we read, "the Spirit rested on them, and they prophesied." Every man has a nature with two doors opening into him, the influences of two worlds, the infernal and the Divine. "Ye are from beneath," said Christ, "I am from above." "Ye are of your father, I am of mine." Here is the secret of all character, permanence, and usefulness; true alliance measures our faith; that to which we give entrance measures our love, our prayer, our power. Prophets have varied, but this is their character,—“the Spirit rested on them”; sometimes impelling them to a strange and startling step, like Noah preaching the judgment of the flood; sometimes pushing men out

into the wilderness like Abraham, or Moses in his early days ; sometimes citing a man to appear and launch his judgments before and against a king, like Elijah before Ahab ; sometimes descending on a man in a palace, as on Isaiah ; sometimes alighting upon a farm-labourer, a herdsman, like Amos ; sometimes on a ploughman like Elisha ; sometimes moving over the workman at his task, like Matthew at the receipt of custom, or Peter mending his nets, casting a spell upon them, and beckoning them away ; sometimes arresting a man like Paul, and smiting him down. But the characteristics are the same : "the Spirit of the Lord rested upon them, and they prophesied." How hard it is to speak when this is not the case—how easy when it is : how hard to work when uninspired within—how easy when the Divine Spirit blows !

I have often been amazed at the passionate expressions indulged by the Countess of Huntingdon, in one of her letters to John Wesley. Her life shows how real they were. She says, "My whole heart has not one single grain this moment of thirst after approbation. I feel alone with God ; He fills the whole void ; I see all mortals under my feet ; I have not one wish, one will, one desire, but in Him ; He hath set my feet in a large room. All but God's children seem to me as so many machines appointed for uses which I have nothing to do with. I have wondered and stood amazed that God should make a conquest of all within me by love."

2. A second personal characteristic is, "*they were of those who were written.*" They had a name and a place; they had church fellowship, and church sanction, and church appointment; they had church relations, and church inclusiveness. I believe it will be found that the greatest proportion of the good which has been attempted, has been attempted by those who were acknowledged as Christian folk, and who acknowledged themselves Christians, and whose names were undoubtedly "*written in the Lamb's book of life.*" But, indeed, I think we want all things to be wrought more by those who are written: do we not leave good things to be wrought too much by worldly men? Nothing, I should hope, could be worse done for the being done by those "*who are written*" down as the children of faith. To have a vivid perception of the truth, to have a believing sense of it, this gives vitality to labour; and this it is to belong to the church, to belong to the number of those who are written, to live to increase the number of those who are written.

[II.] There are *some characteristics of the prophet of a more general nature.* And in one word I sum up what he is; he is marked by *Intensity*. Intensity; this may be in alliance with more or less refined sensibility, but it will be his characteristic; if a refined sensibility, it will restrict him to refined duties: he will be a psalmist, like Watts, or Ken, or Cowper; or a teacher of the selecter few, but none the less

characterised by intensity if he be a man of rougher sensibilities—an Eldad or Medad, a John Nelson, a Silas Told—stirred and wrought upon by an imperial sense of duty to step out into extraordinary work. *What is Intensity?* It is the combination of earnestness and sincerity. How many sincere natures there are which never knew an earnest pulse, correct and cold; theirs is religion made polite; everything in them is sincere as far as it goes. But if Christ had been such as they! If the first apostles had been such as they! If the Church through all ages had been composed of such as they! The world had never had a Redeemer; and if He had come, the Church would have died of inanition. Sometimes we see earnestness without sincerity, a sort of red animal heat; sometimes we see sincerity without earnestness, a gentle, lambent, inoperative flame, a sort of glow-worm light, trembling lest it should be discovered, and if discovered instantly retiring into the dark. But intensity!—sometimes it burns so quietly, spreads itself out with such strength and heat, that it is almost unperceived. What intensity must have been in Moses—what fulness of Divine life, light, and power, and fire! His anxiety wrought upon by vehement emotion, the energies of all the seventy were in him. As Moses chose seventy, Christ chose seventy, and said to them, Go forth! Hence his large thoughts. Large minds are known by their large thoughts; and oftentimes what seems littleness, or narrowness, is

rather inadequacy of vision ; and you see in the man Moses were many Eldads and Medads : it was the spirit of Moses divided over the seventy ; one Moses makes many teachers. See the influence of a great man ; even like a lamp, as has often been said, which from its single flame kindles many another lamp. Intensity, I say,—absorption, the unanimous and concentraneous rush of the powers to a central work ; intensity, like *intense* light, *intense* heat, *intense* flame, what we speak of as energy, ardour. Intensity—intensity in contradistinction to the worldly or scholastic indifference,—this is the prophet's characteristic ; he is impelled beyond ordinary men by his emotions, and that word describes him and them, and thus you see there are those of the Lord's people who are *not* prophets, nor fitted to be ; only let such never sit in judgment on the prophet. It is only "the spirit of the prophet that should be subject to the prophet," and especially let none such dare to assume that they have had the prophet's call. Shall I throw this intensity into two or three particulars, separating its attributes ?

1. Is it not most natural that *there should be intense thought and concern for the Divine glory* ? An intense desire that God may be seen to be right, and that His holiness and beauty may come out well ? This is that "*zeal*"—read it fire ! for that is the word—"of the Lord of Hosts" ; this is that "*zeal*"—read it fire ! for that is the word—"of Thine house which hath

eaten me up"—that is, consumed me as in a flame. This is a prime article in the prophet's character: this is God's world; he, even he, though only a man, feels that he may vindicate God in it; he looks high as he pronounces the all-holy and all-inclusive name of God. High aims inspire high works: work for man, and you will most likely be disappointed; work for God and for His glory, never! "O Lord! in Thee have I trusted, let me never be confounded!" That is a sublime prayer. "They daily say unto me, Where is thy God?" and this soul says, "*The night is far spent, and the day is at hand,*" and "the Lord will command His loving-kindness in the day-time." Beneath the ever visible great Task-Master's eye the work goes on, and the prophet will not work in vain.

2. Shall I not say *intensity for man*? How some good prophets have loved human souls! Is not sympathy for men, the "beholding the transgressors and being grieved," a gauge and test of the Divine prophetic force in the soul? You have stories, biographies of prophets who were visited by a great concern; this was what led Paul, as he says, "not to be satisfied with another man's line of things, but to preach the gospel in the regions or nations beyond." Do you not recollect (is it not in the preface of his first volume of travels?) Livingstone quotes that text, and says it was the motive power which pushed him out? Is not that what he means when he says, "The *end* of the geographical feat is the beginning of the mis-

sionary enterprise"? And the dreadful animalisms, the cankerous populations of our great towns, we blame God for them!—we ought to blame ourselves. God has given strength to human agency to work out human amelioration, if men were faithful—oh, especially if we were faithful; and as it is, Eldad and Medad are doing all that is done; and oh, how many are saying, "*My lord Moses forbid them!*"

3. Shall I not say that there is *an intense desire to be useful*? That I may do good "this one thing I do." A desire that life should flow out somehow in a stream to fertilize, somehow in praise which shall be power. The prophets and St. Paul talked of a Gentile world. Behold, our Gentile world is all around us!

[III.] *And what of the prophet's success?* And in the first place *Eldad and Medad must not expect everybody's good word*; must not expect always to be very successful; must not expect always the good word even of good men. Dr. Watts wrote to Dr. Doddridge how sorry he was to hear he had been preaching for Whitefield at the Tabernacle; he begged him not to allow Whitefield to preach for him as he intended. Even this dear doctor regarded Whitefield's work as wild and fanatical; but he came to see his mistake, and although Watts did not die in Whitefield's arms, as has been so often said, only a short time before his death the two had loving and affectionate intercourse with each other.

“My lord Moses forbid them!” See, this is the little thought of a little mind; little thoughts and little ideas grow in little minds, but sometimes little thoughts grow in large minds too. How angry John Wesley was with the idea of lay preaching; how earnestly he opposed it; he was as angry about it as Joshua was with Eldad and Medad, till the influence of his pious mother compelled him to think differently; and lay preaching became one of the chief pillars of Methodism.

2. *Eldad and Medad must not expect always even the good word of those for whom they labour*; but the bad word must be borne. “There is not much satisfaction in working for these people,” said a benevolent man to me one day, some years after he had done his best at forming a People’s Institute. “Whence did you expect your satisfaction to spring,” said I; “from them or yourself?” “The good man shall be satisfied from himself,” and unhappy indeed if he expect it from any other quarter; from himself and God, these give—

What nothing earthly gives nor can destroy,—
The soul’s calm sunshine, and the heartfelt joy.

3. *Eldad and Medad must expect their success as prophets will depend upon the fitness of their labour to the place of their labour*; the prophecy that would be acceptable in the tabernacle may be quite unsuited to the camp; the prophecy admirable in the camp

may be unseemly in the tabernacle. A great many foolish things have been said and written about preaching and preachers; once for all let it be said, the work of the reaper is not the work of the ploughman; in the sanctuary words have to be spoken which many are not prepared to hear. Great was the difference between Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost and Paul's sermon on Mars' Hill, or Christ's sermon from the deck of the ship to the multitude on the shore and His sermon to the select few after the Supper.

So Eldad and Medad must set to work, and we have tens of thousands of illustrious examples; the Countess of Huntingdon gives her rank, position, and £100,000; Robert Raikes gathers ragged children round about him in the city of Gloucester, forms what was a ragged school, and lays the foundation of what is now the great Sunday School system; Hannah More and her sister—quite High Church women in their way, Hannah especially the friend of royalty and the beloved of bishops—goes down to Cheddar, breaks in on the monotony and wickedness of a most godless village; of course has herself to fight the very Church system of which she was an admirer, but preaching, praying, reading, and singing, she moves the neighbourhood to devotion, and leaves a boundless blessing behind. Or think of John Pounds of Portsmouth, a very poor hardly-worked shoemaker: he gave the idea of the Ragged School;

his was the first crude notion which has been so happily, so universally, so successfully worked. Or think of Sarah Martin ; I am as surprised as rejoiced to see the Tract Society has just published her life ; in Yarmouth she pursued her sainted, hallowed way. A very poor woman, her labours in the infirmary, in the workhouse, among the lowest poor, have long set her apart as one of the most simple but one of the most useful day-labourers in the Church of our time.

We are sometimes told the Church in our day is a failure ; at first it almost looks like it, but if it is so, why ? Why but because we waste the time in speculation which should be devoted to action ? Did you ever hear of the voyage made to discover the properties of the magnetic needle ? The ship was filled with books ; it had many philosophers discussing the properties of the magnet in the cabin. Is it a stream or current of air ?—is it a spirit ?—is it moved from south to north or north to south ?—what is it ? Ah ! what is that ? Crash ! crash ! the vessel is on the rocks ; she has struck, she is going to pieces : how—how shall they reach the shore ? The ship is engulfed in the waves, and the philosophers sit down on the beach and unanimously agree that at any rate the needle cannot be trusted. Do you know a ship called the Church which seems to be in the same dilemma ? But if the Church is on the rocks, who is to blame ?

Finally, your religion is not an amusement, it is action ; it is not speculation, it is faith. I only ask

this : to the measure of our faith let us be true ; it is then quite astonishing how it will grow. Faithful, even in the smallest, we know how the light brightens and the faith grows. Unfaithful in the least, also is a growing unfaithfulness ; imperceptibly it dims and darkens, until at last the disk of the soul is left, the light entirely gone, and every trace of form swept away.

IX.

Kirjath-sepher, the Village of Books.

“And unto Caleb the son of Jephunneh he gave a part among the children of Judah, according to the commandment of the Lord to Joshua, even the city of Arba, the father of Anak, which city is Hebron. And he went up thence to the inhabitants of Debir : and the name of Debir before was Kirjath-sepher. And Caleb said, He that smiteth Kirjath-sepher, and taketh it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife. And Othniel, the son of Kenaz, the brother of Caleb, took it : and he gave him Achsah his daughter to wife.”—JOSHUA XV. 13-17.

THIS Kirjath-sepher was a village such as you may very easily conceive, only a few miles—in the moors or downs—beyond Hebron. *Kirjath*, as I say, signifies a city or town—a place of some importance : *Kirjathaim*, a double city ; *Kirjath-arba*, city of Arba ; *Kirjath-baal*, city of Baal ; *Kirjath-jearim*, city of woods or forests ; *Kirjath-sannah*, city of palms ; *Kirjath-sepher*, city of books. It was necessary that city should be taken, and Caleb said, “To him that taketh yonder city will I give Achsah my daughter to wife.”

There is a mighty and mysterious science of names

in the Bible, and the spiritual plays with it in a very extraordinary manner, and hearkens to mysterious voices in it. So some have played with that singularly happy and significant name, Christopher Columbus—*i.e.*, the Christ-bearing Dove, for that is literally the meaning of the great discoverer's name,—the Dove who passed over the great sea, bringing back the green leaves, while he made a way over the waves for the Cross.* Alas that in the hands of his followers it should have been the sign of another crucifixion! But it must be admitted that Hebrew history and literature are full of these most happy and impossible-to-be-designed coincidences; and in any case, in following out the etymology of Hebrew names, the Bible has an amazing additional, and surely a mysterious interest.

Now Achsah means *the unveiled* beauty, or the rending of the veil. And Othniel, her cousin, who took it, signifies the Lion of God, or God's opportunity; and *Debir*, which became the name of the city, signifies, the Word.

Time was when preachers made perhaps too much of these things; but it is very wonderful to notice how the Word of God seems to be written from a double sense. As it is in Solomon's Song, "*Every word beareth twins, and there is none barren among them*";

* See this idea fancifully but ingeniously wrought out in "What's your Name?" by Sophia Moody.

so, if you like to read and study, you will find how this parable holds that secret, and mysteries couch under these veils of speech.

And we ought not to be surprised to find the Bible written on some deep principles of signification like this ; this does not diminish the least tittle of the letter. And the Bible is written on deep principles. What has the apostle said ? " Which things are an allegory : for these are the two covenants, the one from the Mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem, which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all."*

What are these histories to us, and what do they show us ? Why, the Divine life in the soul of man as in a picture ; the apostle tells us they are the story of what is in us : there is in us a son of bondage and fear to be cast out, and the Son of holy love to inherit. So that the second and third chapters of Genesis are fulfilled in us ; the serpent solicits and seduces, it shows to us Satan's method in the soul of man, set upon by his affections, which are the soonest overcome. The woman was first in the transgression ; the affections first give way, then the Adam fear will yield, and both come into the condemnation. Thus

* Galatians iv. 24-26.

the Word is fulfilled in us, thus the Scriptures contain "a pearl of price," and we do well "to sell all we have to purchase that field," and to gather its hidden manna. What an illustration you have of every word bearing twins, I say, in every part of the word of God! I take the sixtieth Psalm. What sense can be made of it excepting upon some bold system of spiritual correspondence? "God hath spoken in His holiness; I will rejoice, I will divide Shechem, and mete out the valley of Succoth. Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine; Ephraim also is the strength of mine head; Judah is my lawgiver; Moab is my washpot; over Edom will I cast out my shoe: Philistia, triumph thou because of me."*

But just as Moses might have stood long enough looking at the rock—till he fainted for thirst, if he had not smote the rock—so we must strike the letter of God's Word, that we may drink of the deep waters of consolation.

It is this which makes the believer's heart so glad, gives such a bound and thrill at some happy quotation from the Word of God. You know, some of you, what pleasure there is in a happy quotation from a line of Horace, or some happy application of a line from Shakespeare: it is so from this, which is really the Book of the whole race; to find how "every word bears twins"; how every person, image, city, conquest,

* Psalm lx. 6-8.

turns to Christ and to His covenant. Therefore it is that a happy quotation of words of the Old Testament turns them into a new revelation, a new Gospel of consolation to the soul. When we strike this rock, and gather up this manna; when we enter this tabernacle—here is a book-city, strong, impregnable; but by the Lion of God you can take it, and then you may know the beauty of the rent veil.

Without doubt I find much truth in the words of Luther, and much wisdom. In his old age he said, "I can neither labour nor discourse any more. When I was young," he said, "I was learned; then I dealt altogether with allegories and analogies,—there was nothing about me but altogether art; now I have shaken it off, and my only art is to deliver the Scripture in the simple sense,—that does the deed, therein is life, and strength, doctrine, art." It is even so; but it is said upon all the glory there is a defence. I would fain inquire into some of these sacred defences behind which seem to peep and tremble such Divine realities.

For as I read this story of the taking of the book-city, that old Kirjath-sepher, I thought, there is a book-city which needs to be taken,—a book-city of frivolity, a book-city of false doctrine, heresy, and schism, in our age. What a wide word is the word *book*—the City of Books; now we need not therefore conceive a Canaanitish circulating library. No; they were no doubt stone books; in those days Egypt was the great City of

Stone Books; our very word book carries us back to a time when the Beech tree—the *Buckin* of the Saxon—was the only method of perpetuating facts or ideas. Buckinghamshire was the Beechshire, and the book was the Beech record, or poem, or archive. Indeed, some translators give it the City of the Archives. Go to Dartmoor; there you will go up to the Sacred Circle, and the long street of stones or stone avenue, the mighty monolith at the end,—all things pointing that out as a Canaanitish city. There they kept their records; there was their university, the sacred asylum of their archives. Such, amidst the wild moors and downs beyond Hebron, was Kirjath-sepher,—take that, said Caleb.

But imagination vainly wonders and attempts to explore the secrets of those stone books. Isaac Taylor in his gorgeous romance, the “Temple of Melekartha,”* in which he has attempted to portray the civilization of the old Canaanitish world or Phœnician world, may have fancied such a village in his City of Rest. Stupendous structures surrounded by the verdure and gaiety of gardens; public ways which gave no passage to traffic or vulgar occupations; surrounded and bordered by rows of spreading trees shadowing the colleges, whose ancient structures rose from surrounding groves. So, like the huge Stonehenge of the ancient world, might Kirjath-sepher rise—consecrated,

* “Temple of Melekartha.” Three volumes, 1831.

we may be very sure—to the cruel Druidic rites of that old time ; not merely a learned Canaanitish Oxford, but a cruel Phœnician adoration of Ashtaroth and Baal, and the objects of nature in which forces were seen.*

For men live in their books : I never feel more persuaded of the immortality of man than when I go over and gaze up to the treasures of a great library. Oh, what realms ! What unknown multitudes have contributed here : and they have gone ; but they have left behind them what does not pass. Every great library is a book-city : what populations line the shelves, and almost seem to haunt the room ; and there are men who seem to go up and take it, and possess themselves of it all,—sciences, languages, many forms of literature. But I fear that to many, even to most, the great library is not the resting-place ; it harasses, it disturbs. We do not possess it, it possesses us ; it overwhelms us merely to think what souls passed out of themselves into these pages. These are the photographs of mind ; and in the proportion in which likenesses have multiplied in our age, so have books multiplied. Depend upon it, in the days of Kirjath-sepher they were few, and the few tables of stone. For the most part now, people who read little are confused by the results of books ; for flippant thoughts, generated of flippant or bad books, are ex-

* See an interesting and most promising and scholarly Essay, "Phœnicia and Israel," by Augustus Wilkins, M.A.

pressed, and the party judgments of newspapers and slight reviews are given; and books are so often a mere luxury, a mere amusement, that it may be feared they emasculate the mind they quicken. There are not many minds so strong that they are able to smite the book-city, and possess themselves of its treasures, while refusing to permit their freedom to be lost by a servile and thoughtless residence within its enclosure. In our day the power to read aright is one of the wants more to be deplored; we live in a city of books which we have not conquered, but which, by the creation of self-consciousness and conceit and mental servility, it is to be feared, is conquering us. For the kind and quality of a man's literature is the vesture of himself; and, as of other things, so what the man reads the man is, and as the man reads the man acts. Reading these things, then, I find a lesson here, that we have to conquer the book-city before we can enter our Holy Land.

[I.] Is it not so in the beginning of the Christian life?—is there not a book-city to be smitten, a world of theories, the out-birth of bad books, to be forsaken? The first thing the Ephesian converts did, and the thing which proved their conversion, was this: their magical books were brought out. Are there not still magical books to be destroyed? If a good book is one of the blessed influences, a "bad book is the worst; and the worst in that it cannot," as the old proverb says, "repent." Books ought to make us strong, healthy,

wise, good ; if they do this they cannot be bad, if they do neither of these they must be evil. How—how do you rise over, and strike the bad books in the world ? Not by argument, but by prayer ; not by reading, not by refusing, but by the sword of Othniel—by God's opportunity. You are held back by certain doubts, impossibilities of reconciliation of the infinite question in the finite mind. " By their fruits ye shall know them." What will not stand the sharp edge of God's Word, that sword of mighty power, believe me, it is not Divine. Our age is filled with bookmen ; so singularly the ages are reproduced. Every age of intellectual luxury is the age of moral feebleness : it was the age of Socrates in Greece ; they laughed at the babbling old man ; the Satirists and the Sophists, the fine Saturday reviewers of that day, scoffed at him, suspended his effigy in their plays, murdered him at last. Any age which breaks out in scoff and satire is the age of decline. It was so in Greece, so in Rome ; the day of the elegant, worldly-wise perfectness and decorous sneering of Horace was the age of Juvenal's indignant, wrathful, saturnine scorn ; and both were the prophets of decline. It was the same with the age of our Lord in Judæa ; the Sadducee, when he gets the upper hand in any age, in any society, is like the voice which cries "*Woe ! woe ! Viabictis !*" Let us renounce the books and the papers which sap the springs of faith ; which is the same thing of moral energy. Let us renounce the books which deprave the moral

nobility in man,—all books do this which impeach the Fatherhood and Providence of God.

You cannot, indeed, sully the gold of His throne, or shade the glory of His Majesty ; but if you do this to yourself it is as one. The filthy insect which trails its slime over the Corinthian pillar does not impair the firmness of the edifice, or rob the fluted column of its correctness ; but it draws attention to the impurity of its own being.

[II.] The Bible itself is a Kirjath-sepher : have you taken *it*, or has *it* conquered you ? *Othniel*, the lion of the tribe of Judah, he hath power to take the Book and to loosen the seals thereof ; for the want of prayerful study, and not remembering the essential, awful character of the Book, there are many to whom it is a fortified city. “ We need,” said Robinson, “ more light to break forth from God’s Word ; I believe we have not pierced into a millionth part of its wonders ; it being what it is. I believe it has openings as wonderful as any which yet remain to the realms of astronomy or chemistry. Smite the city, you shall see ; or I would say, Go up to the City of the Word and *take it*. At first there is in it that which seems dreadful ; even as in nature, “ the letter killeth.” I fear in much of our searching we have scarcely gone beyond the poorest conception of the letter. But draw near, and see this great sight ; this bush burns with fire ; take thy shoes from off thy feet, and still draw near. Why do we not know it is alive and aglow

with one system of analogy and symbol? We use them every day, they enter into our household words and phrases, they inspire and sanctify our noblest hopes. Go up to the city and take it. Grammarians and critics and rhetoricians guard the way. They look like lions; be not afraid, pass through them, through them all. Through every age it has come out more incorruptibly, the Word. It looks like the very durable firmament, like the everlasting stars; it will survive all shocks,—only make it yours.

“Within this awful Volume lies
The mystery of mysteries.
Happiest he of human race
To whom his God has given grace
To read, to fear, to hope, to pray,
To lift the latch, to force the way;
But better had he ne’er been born
Than read to doubt or read to scorn.”

X.

Shiloh, the Village of the first Tabernacle.

"But go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first."—JEREMIAH vii. 12.

A SENTIMENT of awe was generally felt, I believe, through the nation, when we heard a short time since that Canterbury cathedral was on fire. Some, it is to be hoped many, amongst us are not indifferent to the power of these mute and material things, and we feel a thrill of sympathy when they threaten to perish or pass away. Canterbury is dear to many of us by its associations; it is supposed to be the place of the first Christian shrine,—the first temple for Christian worship in our land; and such was the village of Shiloh. When the children of Israel took possession of the Promised Land, there the ark stayed from its wanderings, there it rested on a bare (as it seems to us), uninteresting hill; no love of nature, no loveliness, no beauty seemed to dictate the selection of the spot; it would seem as if there was nothing to gladden the heart, when the

eye rested on the surrounding scenery—nothing “to lend to loneliness delight” ; but they called it Shiloh, for the tabernacle of God’s peace was there. Shiloh was one of those mystical words hinting in itself a revelation—words with which the Hebrew language abounded. We sing—

“ By cool Siloam’s shady rill,
How sweet the lily grows.”

This is sung of that Siloam of which the prophet speaks, concerning the pool of which we have the story of a beautiful miracle, “The waters of Siloam which go softly,” or peaceably. But Shiloh, or Siloa, had the same meaning, and it signified the home, the house of peace ; and Shiloh was the very name given to the remote Messiah long ages before by Jacob on his death-bed, in a prophecy most exactly fulfilled : “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver, till Shiloh come.”

The village of Shiloh, where the ark rested on the heights, was a little sequestered spot ; there the tabernacle abode between three hundred and four hundred years. All those ages elapsed before it changed its place, and there came about that marvellous succession of vicissitudes in the history of the ark of the Lord ; in the centre of the land it stood, the representative shrine, the representative seat of law, government, authority, and worship ; through all the days of the

judges the Lord was known in Shiloh; and though we are *not* to "think that God is worshipped in temples made with hands, as though He needed anything," on the other hand we are told, "the Lord loved the gates of Zion"; and there are few so cold and undevo- tional as to remain unaffected while their feet tread through the fanes hallowed by the devotions of many generations. Such buildings link together the past and the present, the living and the dead, the Church militant and the Church triumphant; and it seems as if we ought to seek to erect such shrines and temples as will bear and stand against and lift themselves up through the blasts and the storms of the elements, and echo to the feet of many generations. What heart can remain altogether insensible to the power of the village church, or to the strong old church even of the crowded town! Let the conclave of opinion and the changes of sentiment rave as they will round the spot, and even the forms of service change within, "the spire, whose silent finger points to heaven," the ancient ivy-mantled tower standing in its place of graves, surrounded by its black yews or shady elms, is a Shiloh, a house of peace; calmly it stands, and seems to say to the drifting generations as they pass, "Come hither, come hither; I am something in a world of change, speaking of that which does not change; I abide, I endure. Peace—peace is what I speak of; and what I prophesy I testify to: a 'peace passing all understanding.' Peace! peace!—the end,

the hope, the harbour, and the home of souls. I speak of that which is above the noise of the waves and the storm of the clouds and the tumult of the people. I am a symbol, a representative word, to call you, O generations, to recollection ; to say something stilling to you when you are turbulent, and cheerful to you when you are troubled. I am myself a minister ; and if you come and sit in me when I am quite empty, when there is no organ speaking, and no voices wailing or worshipping, I shall talk to you, if you will be quiet ; my pavement and my walls and my windows shall all have something to say ; and I will draw your mind into rest. I will speak to you of the past, and that shall quiet you ; and I will speak to you of the future, and that shall inspire you ; for let the present be ever so agitated, the great past and the great future are very still. And you, O man, belong to both ; you have an inheritance in both ; an infinite seed-field is behind you and before you ; your troubled life is only a moment, a point between the two. Look at me, and look up : I am Shiloh, the building, the shrine, the sign of peace."

Men have in all ages desired such places ; the Jews had many such,—making a difference between the one great representative building, "the earth's one sanctuary," and other places which were to them places of worship, devotion, and instruction ; as we read of many synagogues, and that "Moses, in old time, hath in every city them that preach him, being

read in the synagogue every Sabbath-day.* Here, upon the high place, the ark rested in the tabernacle. I have spoken of it as its first resting-place, because the period of seven years during which it remained in Gilgal was evidently tentative and temporary until the entire land should be sufficiently conquered ; then it was removed to this place, in the seventh year of the government of Joshua ; and upon this bald hill it rested until the death of Eli, three hundred and forty-nine years after. Uninviting as at first the site appears, this was probably the reason of its selection. Idolatry was so associated among the earlier and later nations of the earth with the grove and the deep shady recesses, amidst whose mysterious trees the marbles gleamed, inviting to arcades beyond, where the cruel and the impure rites of heathenism maintained their sway, that such surrounding assistances to imagination were quite forbidden to the devotions and worship of the Hebrews. They were probably tolerated from ancient usage and the necessities of residence, as they overshadowed the private altar of the household, or guarded, as at Sichein, some hoary memorial shrine ; but here, where the people were to look to worship, and where they would gather in vast multitudes, and thus in time become dangerously in the neighbourhood of temptation to the evil ways of idolatry, the shrine was set up amidst the uninviting

* Acts xv. 21.

circumstances of the Mosaic law. Shiloh, then, was another Village of the Ark ; it was the abode of peace. There the grand institutes of the Hebrew worship reigned in all their impressive solitude. Out of Shiloh went forth the law ; as yet Zion was not : this was "the hill of the Lord." At the same time, in those early ages, strewn over the land, rose the sacred places ; and many of those psalms which speak of the house of the Lord, and the desire and the delight to dwell there, are echoes, refrains wafted from the smaller tabernacles—"little sanctuaries"—what we have come to call *Proseuchas*, or praying-places. Light is thrown upon many of the psalms by the knowledge of this circumstance ; such psalms have a sweet, meditative, restful tone, inconsistent with the idea of their being the utterances of the hosts of the nation in the vast annual temple services. Some of them ring with the acclamations and shouts of amazing multitudes ; but even the eighty-fourth Psalm, while it may evidently be the production of a time when the ark and tabernacle were seated on Zion, breathes all the spirit of a people who had their village sanctuary ; the *proseucha* was something like the village chapel as compared with the great metropolitan church. This gives the explanation to the circumstance which has sometimes been perplexing : that while the tabernacle was set up at Shiloh, there is mention made of a sanctuary at Sichem ; and we are told that there "Joshua took a great stone, and

set it up under the oak, which was in, or by, the sanctuary of the Lord ;" from which we are not to gather any contradiction, but only to see that this was one of those earliest praying-places erected by the Israelites very naturally after they had conquered the country which had been promised to them for an inheritance, and where God had made the promise to Abraham, who had pitched his tent beneath those trees and raised his altar there long ages before. Indeed, those who are well versed in Hebrew antiquities draw a distinction between two inferior sacred places in the worship of the Jews—the *Proseucha* and the Synagogue. The *Proseucha* was not at all necessarily a Synagogue, probably not in any sense one,—it was even a kind of private oratory ; it was a mere plot of ground, an inclosed field, a sequestered place for meditation, open above ; a mound, an altar, having relation to the private habitation. But a Synagogue was a building, a covered edifice in which the people could concourse together to hear the Scriptures read and expounded, and to indulge in strains of vocal and instrumental melody ; lacking all the grandeur of the rich temple service, where the breath from the long lines of silver trumpets stirred the air, and the phonal and antiphonal chant ascended in its imposing and overwhelming swell of voice. Lacking all this, the Synagogue was a kind of village chapel, in which the memory of religious truth and the Divine law were kept alive in the soul, and where,

as we may hope in so many of our village chapels, sacred service became something of a Divine recreation. It is very interesting to perceive that the Jews had such places; it is what we might infer; so was their service discriminated into the family and private, the provincial and the great national and public occasions,—the last necessarily, as in all services, holding a very slight place, in fact, as compared with the first two. How could religion be sustained among a people who should only regard it as a time of show, when crowds of the kingdom gathered from all its divisions and tribes? But it was in the village chapel, the synagogue, in the praying-place, the Proseucha, on “the mountain in the field,” that Divine service in the country sustained its power. It is true Shiloh itself was but a village; and even when long years had given to it eminence and fame, as the place where the ark rested, still to us but a poor village; but indeed it was then even more than afterwards. Even the walled cities so called were but little clusters of people, and had not attained the strength of the giant cities of Bashan. The Israelites were never gigantic builders, like the neighbouring and surrounding nations; but Shiloh was a representative village, and while it heaved itself up there, crowned by the ark, it was from year to year the place of their holy festivities and sacrifices; it testified to the same spirit of service pervading all the villages, the larger and the smaller gatherings of the land.

So for a long time Shiloh remained a holy and memorable spot ; many travellers place here that very remarkable scene recited in the Book of Judges : * it is said an angel of the Lord appeared at Bochim, reproving the people for having entered into league with the inhabitants of the land, and for having shown a friendly spirit to their idolatry. "Wherefore," said the angel of the Lord, "I also said, I will not drive them out from before you ; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you. And when the angel of the Lord spake these words unto all the children of Israel, the people lifted up their voice and wept. And they called the name of that place Bochim," that is, the place of the weepers, "and they sacrificed there to the Lord." It is a singular sight, a nation in tears ; they were a singular, passionate people, and, as the names of their places indicate, they fixed their emotions in every spot. Eminently in the Israelitish nation there was a wonderful identity of names and places ; they wept here, for in some mysterious manner, to us incomprehensible, they became aware of the angel of the Lord. They wept selfish tears, for they were yet to suffer ; by their indolence and remissness they had strengthened the arms of their enemies. It appears to have been a singularly passionate moment : some great and overwhelming sensation of grief carried them away ; and

* Judges ii. 1-5.

they wept with joy as well as penitence, for were they not yet in the presence of the angel of the Lord, and hovering over their head did they not still see Shiloh, their shrine of happiness and peace?

But a very impressive picture comes to us from that sacred village ; it was here the great settlement of the land took place, showing to us how in those early ages all the arrangements of property received the sanction of religion. Here "the lot was cast into the lap," and the people were reminded that "the whole disposal was of the Lord"; here they were reminded that gaining was not a rude scramble of gambling, that it was fenced round by Divine laws and limitations, that property was not to be regarded as a mere lottery of chances ; faith, not force, presided over all their arrangements. Certainly in that early settlement and disposition of the land we have set before us the idea of a true republic. Property was consecrated before the tabernacle of the Lord ; it was neither a wild democracy, running riot while "every man did that which was right in his own eyes," neither was it the exhibition of the favouritism of feudalism in which the great conqueror of the field distributed to his more successful generals the choicest spots as exhibitions of his bounty ; this was not the principle that ruled as Joshua gathered the people together in Shiloh. Here, beneath the shadow of the earliest fane of the nation, to remind them of the Divine tenure by which all things were held and government main-

tained, after Joshua had sent out his commission to descry the land, saying, "Go, walk through the land and describe it, and come to me, that I may here cast lots for you before the Lord in Shiloh ; the men went and passed through the land, and described it by cities into seven parts in a book (a sort of Doomsday Book of Israel), and came again to Joshua to the host at Shiloh. And Joshua cast lots for them in Shiloh before the Lord : and there Joshua divided the land unto the children of Israel according to their inheritance." A marvellous instance this of faith in Divine leading, and the subjection of a whole army by this "self-denying ordinance" to the power of the Divine law, substituting for the partiality of man the arbitrary and holy will of God. Little Shiloh was all astir then ; and wonderful it is to think that those apparent leaps of chance fitted in so marvellously to the second sight of Jacob on his death-bed, and the seership of Moses before he ascended to the heights of Pisgah to die.

Again, I say, how wonderful is the Bible, how varied are its histories : now it enlightens as if by a philosophy of history from Thucydides, and now as if by a wonder-tale from Herodotus. So we have a marvellous little piece of family history at Shiloh : a woman weeping there ; a woman—a heart wrung with anguish ; then a mother almost beside herself with ecstasy and joy, singing there one of the sweetest gospel psalms of the old ages long before David's day, to teach us the lesson of which the Bible is so full ;

that God never permits His people to lose themselves in generalities ; to show how, if He has blessings of the remote and far away, He has blessings of the near. Then she took her little one up to the rude little fane on the hill—tabernacle and shrine—which now seemed the last relic of Israel's nomadic days. She judged there was something in the House of the Lord ; she was evidently one of those who felt that, if we have a heavy grief, it is well to carry it not only to the Lord, but to the House of the Lord ; “and she was heard in that she feared” and trusted.

And here—but in this lecture I dare not open that story—the child Samuel ministered before the Lord in the little coat, or ephod, or surplice, his mother carried up for him every year. What a touching little stroke in the story of the child-life in the village tabernacle ! And there he trimmed the ever-burning lamp, and watched it, or ever it went out before the ark of the Lord. A holy child : and how sweetly shines out the childhood, and how wonderful that ministration ; here was nothing to assist the fancy, no deep glens—an uneven plain, a moderate hill ; a narrow valley, no suggestive grove or majestic cedar : one solitary oak there seems to have been, beneath which Eli was wont to sit in administration, but no commanding, no overawing peak ; all the sublimity was within, stern and severe. So there at Shiloh the mind of the young child who was to be Israel's last, perhaps sublimest, judge and great reformer, grew in chastity

and sternness ; so that mind became fitted to be the vehicle and receptacle of Divinest judgments and truths ; so we are taught that "even a child" may hear the voice of God, treading amidst these solitary and awful shrines, in the neighbourhood of the dreadful wings of the cherubim, the ark, the shekinah. So I have said went on the education of the last of the judges, the Hebrew Athanasius, the Hebrew Calvin, the great commonwealth's man, and yet the great king-maker of his time.

And well was such a stern judge and lawgiver needed ; for what a strange state of society is that, the reflection of which is found in the last incident recorded in the Book of Judges, and the commentary upon which is in the last verse of the chapter : "In those days there was no king in Israel ; every man did that which was right in his own eyes !" From the hill where rested the tabernacle and where still stands the tree, probably the high priest of that day—Israel's judge—was looking down on the festive scene in the valley of the fountain beneath. Unattractive as the spot is now, we need not suppose it was equally unattractive then ; the vineyards climbed and trailed along the undulations which may scarcely be called hills, and the gushing fountain was the convocation-spot round which the daughters of Shiloh came out "to dance in dances," at the yearly feast of the Lord in Shiloh. The more sacred services were over ; it was probably the time of the evening, and the valley

was alive with music and movement, the dance and the merriment of those old days. Around the fountain and along the vale trooped the light groups of the dancers, but among the vineyards were "liers in wait"; and when the dance was at its height, then came forth hundreds of men and caught every man his wife of the daughters of Shiloh, to go to the land of Benjamin. So, by the rape of Shiloh,—famous, surely, in Hebrew history, as that more talked-of rape of the Sabines,—was the tribe of Benjamin saved from extinction, saved by this very curious fashion of courtship. "This the children of Benjamin did, they took them wives according to their number, of them that danced whom they caught; and they returned unto their inheritance, and repaired the cities, and dwelt in them." "Brides of fortune," says Thomas Fuller, "may we not presume that many of them that danced on this day wept on the morrow? Yet one thing might comfort them,—they were all richly married to mighty matches of landed men, seeing the fair and fruitful tribe of Benjamin, with all the cities therein, was to be shared amongst their six hundred husbands alone, as the sole survivors and absolute heirs of the whole country." But indeed Israel needed a governor; well might it be said that "every man did what was right in his own eyes!"

Therefore there fell over Shiloh a day of tremendous darkness and gloom—a day of which we read, that "God forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent

which He placed among men, and delivered His strength into captivity and His glory into the enemy's hand." It happened when Samuel was still young, in the days of the aged, the holy, but the weak Eli. In the battle which raged between the Hebrews and the Philistines, the ark itself was brought forth, in order that, by its presence, its dreadful invisible powers, it might scatter consternation among the enemies of Israel. It was taken; and with that captivity appears to have passed away all the glory of the little village. There, appears to have been residing then one of those grand Hebrew women, so frequently repeated in the story of that nation—marvellous, it seems, above all nations for grand patriotic women—high, faithful, spiritual sagacities burning beneath those dark olive skins. Like many noble women, this was the wife of one who, however high in place, was low in character; and her heart seems to have followed with intense previsions and precognitions the ark of the Lord, as, in that season of national panic and peril, they bore it forth that it might scatter terrors and lightnings of dismay on the foes of the land. This affectionate woman, holy and lofty, was evidently able to forget her own griefs in her country's woes; and when the news came to her that the army was scattered and the ark taken, premature pains came upon her, she could only exclaim, "The ark of God is taken! the ark of God is taken!" She only saw ruin rushing down like a

night upon the land ; and even when they sought to console her with the assurance that she had given birth to a son, and inquired of her what his name should be,—“Ichabod,” she exclaimed, “Ichabod: the glory has departed, the glory has departed, the ark of God is taken ! the ark of God is taken !”

It all fell out as God had declared through Samuel ; if the glory had not entirely departed from Israel, but was hereafter to be re-illumed with more than its ancient splendour, it had departed from Shiloh: “God forsook His tabernacle there.” Henceforth Shiloh dwindled down to a mere village ; its heraldry had deserted it, the glory of its hill had been reft away. The ark never returned ; it became the subject of one of David’s mournful outbursts of lyrical music, in which, in Psalm lxxviii., he recites the whole national story upon the strings of his harp ; and it gave keenness and point to one of the earliest appeals of Jeremiah,—“Go now to my place which was in Shiloh, where I caused my name to dwell at the first, and see what I did unto it, for the wickedness of my people Israel ;” and once again, “If ye will not hearken unto me, then I will make this house like Shiloh.” So we are taught the doctrine that there are judgments which sleep in sins ; the innocent-looking egg contains a serpent brood. Who can doubt that religion has something to do with national happiness and well-being ; that there is a law of life in its observance, and of death when it is treated with contumely and con-

tempt? All these things of Shiloh David heard recited no doubt by his father in times and days which were near then to the incidents which pointed their fearful warnings, and uttered forth their notes to those and to all succeeding times.

Shiloh, I have said, sank to a little insignificant village; still they pointed out, and for ages continued to point out, the spot where Eli and some members of his ill-omened family rested in their graves. And still in its ruined seclusion, as in a sort of hermitage, prophets and seers made their home. Certainly we know of one, Ahijah, with whose name is associated the last historic and one of the most pathetic incidents of the spot. It was at the time when "Abijah the son of king Jeroboam fell sick. And Jeroboam said to his wife, Arise, I pray thee, and disguise thyself, that thou be not known to be the wife of Jeroboam; and get thee to Shiloh: behold, there is Ahijah the prophet, which told me that I should be king over this people. And take with thee ten loaves, and cracknels, and a cruse of honey, and go to him: and he shall tell thee what shall become of the child." Thus Shiloh appears now as the refuge of dishonoured holiness; the aged, faithful servant of the God of Israel, old and blind, like a Hebrew Tiresias. The old prophet had closed his eyes on the outer world and its abominations; he it was who, in the prophetic passion of inspiration, rent the robe of the king, and declared thus that sin and idolatry would rend the

nation. Still the light shone within the soul ; the outer eye was sealed, the soul was full of vision. You see, then, that woman in the garb of a peasant stealing down the ruined village street to the old prophet's house,—no doubt some mean hermetic habitation or cell. She bears presents such as one of the peasant tribe might bear ; but her gait, one thinks, would command some surprise as she passed along. She was a queen and a mother, her heart all awake with anxiety and fear and love ; for queens feel as common mothers feel, and hearts were wrung three thousand years ago with the same pangs which rend them and tear them to-day.

She might have filled her basket with jewels and gold ; but only some loaves of bread, and biscuits, and honey were on the mule she no doubt rode while on her way. Her son, the heir of the throne, was ill, was dying ; and she and her husband had held their counsel together. Abijah, their darling, their hope, their pride, was dying in the proud palace of Tirzah—that beautiful mountain palace, the Windsor of Solomon and the early Jewish kings. Now what is to be done ?

“There are events,” says a great writer, “which may put a man in mind of realities, when he has been living for a long time in a fiction.” Jeroboam had been living in a fiction : he was a politician, a diplomatist ; he had sacrificed himself and his nation to a fiction, to a false policy—the worship of idolatry, the

service of Baal and the groves. Well, he sought the aid of religion. Why not the priests he had everywhere set up to insult the God of his fathers? They would not do now. "Arise, I pray thee, and disguise thyself, that thou be not known to be the wife of Jeroboam." For what a practical contradiction it would have been to the priests of the grove!—as if he had said, They may do very well for you; but for me and my family, we must have others. So always is it; we forsake our idols and take to the living and true God when trial comes. "And it was so, when Ahijah heard the sound of her feet as she came in at the door, that he said, Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam: why feignest thou thyself to be another? for I am sent to thee with heavy words." Oh, but what a foolish woman, what foolish people, to think that prophetic and inward light could foretell the event and circumstance, and not see through the cunning disguise! "Go, tell Jeroboam, thus saith the Lord;" and arise and "get thee to thine own house: and when thy feet enter into the city, the child shall die." Hard words for a mother to hear; but the prophets of the Lord often have to utter hard words. With what varying feelings, but all of agony, would she turn on her homeward way! But vain the disguise now. Ah! but should she loiter on the road, to retard the prophecy? No more to hold her son in her arms alive; no answering kiss; no filial smile any more, from one whose heart must have been tender:

a sweet child, since there was something of God in him. No; I think all sloth was forgotten; she must speed on her way; the bow is in the hand, the arrow trembles on the string, and as she hastens the arrow flies; the palace is in sight; some messenger greets her,—Make haste, the king bids thee make haste; and as her feet echo along the streets he dies. She enters the sick-room, only to behold her darling for ever still,—the heart warm, but silent. “When she came to the threshold of the door the child died.” How real it makes all this when, to-day, the Bedoueen, as you go through Shiloh or Seilan, points out the tomb of the old prophet Ahijah!

XI.

The Tents of the Villages of Kedar.

“The villages that Kedar doth inhabit.”—ISAIAH xlii. 11.

IF we think of the villages of the Bible, surely we must not forget those most truly unwall'd villages composed altogether of tents. Kedar is, in fact, the same word as our Cedar, applied to a tree, as it is the black or the dark tree. So the tribes of Kedar were the dark-skinned men, as they also were dwellers in the dark tents,—“As the tents of Kedar,” tents of blackness. Kedar was the second son of Ishmael; upon what principle his name was given we know not, and the colour of the skin of the wild Ishmaelite, and the colour of the tent in which he sojourns, do not differ from either the tribes or the tents around. These villages and their tents and their tribes, however, have quite a sufficient and distinct character, setting them apart among the people of the Bible. They are the children of the desert, they will not weld and mingle into ordinary ideas of society, and the tent is the very building of the desert and the wilderness. There, among those monotonous sheets of

sand, you may feel as the poet felt when he gazed on the ocean :—

“Thy coasts were empires changed in all, save thee.
Assyria, Greece, Rome, Carthage,—where are they ?
Not so thou, unchangeable.”

We may see the desert just as Israel saw it in its wanderings, though the storms and tempests of millenniums have gathered and broken over it. “There is,” says one traveller, “an idea of permanence in the very aspect of the wilderness. There is a wild romance in the desert to those who only visit it as an occasion in their lives. Perhaps those who have not experienced it can form no idea of the desert route ; its loneliness, even amidst the members of the caravan ; the hoar antiquity of the scene ; the dreaminess of the ordinary pace of the camels ; the absence of all human habitations ; the sense of vast distance from the great world of civilization ; the fewness of the incidents ; the wild chant of the Arabs towards sunset ; then the wild bivouac in the Arab camp ; its oppressive silence, notwithstanding the tales recited at the tent doors—that great amusement of the tribes, who in groups hang intent on the speaker’s lips : this is the constant life of the villages of Kedar.” The tent life seems at first to be a life of exceeding discomfort ; but perhaps the traveller learns how soon from many things and habits which seem so essentially necessary, life may be pleasantly loosened and

content. No life seems to call forth a more constant exercise of faith; and the wild Arab, although so far removed from us in faith and thought, is sustained by a superstitious dependence on God's never-failing providence; it is only in the tent life we are able very distinctly to realize the sweetness, the fulness, and fitness of many Bible words. Striking the tent, the traveller is reminded that "he is a stranger and a sojourner on earth, as all his fathers were;" that, like Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, he "dwells in tents," "heirs with them of the same promises," "looking for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Transfer your experiences to the fluctuations of tent life and its privations, and then you become aware of the sweetness of those words in Revelations, "He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is on the throne shall feed them, and He shall lead them to living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." A recent traveller has grouped together, in a very graphic manner, many of the various allusions to tent life in the Scriptures; we must quote it, for we could not present them so pithily.

"To give plenty of room we began to enlarge the place of our tent by stretching out the curtains. The hammer and tent-pegs were taken from a bag, as

‘Jael took the nail of the tent and a hammer,’ and fearing a stormy night we proceeded to ‘lengthen the cords and strengthen the stakes’ for security. The upper part of the tent was put up first, like an umbrella, then the lower part fastened to it by loops and wooden buttons; ‘put the taches into the loops, and couple the tent together, that it may be one;’ a portion of it was doubled back to form a door; ‘thou shalt double the sixth curtain in the forefront of the tabernacle,’ and the men did all this in a very few minutes. The tent-pins are driven firmly into the ground, and nothing is more unpleasant at night than the slackening of the ropes. ‘He hath loosed my cord and afflicted me.’ A violent storm blows the whole tent to the earth,—an event which once happened to us, but fortunately at a time when we could retreat to a house not far off. ‘If our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved (literally loosened, or taken down), we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.’ Loosened it must be, even ‘the nail that is fastened in a sure place shall be removed’; and though our present frail bodies may serve as dwellings for our souls during the night of this life, in the morning of the resurrection ‘this corruptible shall put on incorruption’; and happy are those who have believed as the Saviour has said, ‘I go to prepare a place for you;’ ‘a tabernacle that shall not be taken down, not one of the stakes thereof shall

ever be removed, neither shall any of the cords thereof be loosened.' " *

Lord Houghton has in elegant verses very vividly expressed the poetry of the tent :—

"The fathers of our mortal race, while still remembrance nursed
Traditions of the glorious place whence Adam fled accursed,
Rested in tents, as best became, children whose mother, Earth,
Had overspread with sinful shame the beauty of her birth.

And while this holy sense remained through easy shepherd cares,
In tents they often entertained the angels unawares ;
And to their spirits' fervid gaze the mystery was revealed,
How the world's wound in future days should by God's love be
healed.

Thus we so late and far, a link of generation's chain,
Delight to dwell in tents and think the old world young again ;
With Faith as wide and Thought as narrow as theirs who little
more
From life demand than the sparrow, gay chirping by the door.

The tent, how easily it stands, almost as if it rose
Spontaneous from the green or sand, express for our repose ;
And all your happiest memories woo and mingle with your
dreams,
The yellow desert glimmering through the subtle veil of beams.

Then fold the tent—then on again ; one spot of ashen black,
The only sign that here has been the traveller's recent track ;
And gladly forward, safe to find at noon and eve a home,
Till we have left our tent behind the homeless ocean foam."

Thus the poet sings of the tent, and so the fifth

* "Three Days in the East," quoted in a "Journal of a Deputation to the East."

chapter of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians may truly be described as the Song of the Tent-Makers. I have often called that chapter the tent-makers' song : Paul was by profession a tent-maker ; we find in the eighteenth chapter of the Acts that he wrought at his trade ; and it is pleasant to think of him with his friends conversing together and comparing together notes of the spiritual life, and turning life and its manifold occupations into a poem, a spiritual and Divine analogy, linking and relating together the visible and the invisible, the spiritual and the material ; and in that chapter in the Corinthians, the tent and the garment are mingled together in the imagery of the apostle. It is remarkable the Greek word *skenos*, tent, is that from which we also derive our word skin. Sometimes the tent was composed of skins (perhaps usually the tents of Kedar), sometimes of haircloth ; but, in either case, it mingled the ideas of a habitation and a vesture. Hence there was much of suggestion and deep instruction in the occupation of the tent-maker. The tent was the mediator between the bodily frame and the heavens ; in a similar way the skin of the human body and the body itself is the *skenos* between the world unseen and the soul. The body, as the apostle argues, is the tent of the spirit, "the earthly house of this tent or tabernacle ;" it, like the tent, was only a transitory dwelling, a portable habitation, easily raised, how easily destroyed ! But *I* abide although the tent is removed, dissolved, loosened, or lost ; all this evi-

dently governs the apostle's thought. The tent is the mild clothing and vesture of the inhabitant, and when you step out from its enclosures into the desert, it is in fact to be unclothed. How fiercely the sun smites then; nay, what danger even from the moon: its power by night is dangerous as that of the sun by day. The tabernacle may be dissolved, its canvas be rolled up, its poles stretched on the ground, the stakes taken up,—it is a *dissolution*; so, as the senses fade, as the joints weaken, as the body becomes more and more feeble, and at last falls altogether, leaving only the mark of the tomb, it is as the blackened ashes marking the spot where once the tent stood. In that dread moment the question has often been renewed, shall we be unclothed—all the powers laid aside? has this being really entered on a state in which we shall all be *unclothed*? Here men are clothed by many functions; to be unclothed represents the negation of being here. The musician, the Mozart or Beethoven, is clothed with his faculties of song; the warrior with his faculties of strength; the poet with his faculties of melody: what is that state in which it is thought all these are dissolved? Are all these, like parts of the tent, faculties distributed and scattered? Nor this alone; think of the ineffable and beautiful clothing of the skin; think of the nerve laid bare, the whole nervous system quivering in the sun, without the shielding tabernacle; think of the unshaded eye, of the tooth without its enamel, the mind without its mediating consciousness,—this

lunacy is unclothed. Is this the doom of the mind, of the moral nature—unclothed mind, smitten by the fires of eternity, the eye of eternity perpetually shining on the unrobed soul. No, sings the apostle, we shall *not* be unclothed then, but clothed upon; the tabernacle is taken out, but the *skenos* is exchanged for the sky; we shall be gathered into the firmament, and find our house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Such are the notes of the tent-makers' song, and such reflections and pictures are called up from those villages in the far desert which form a world of tents.

I suppose the general idea of most persons is that God was not with Ishmael, so that it seems as if his destiny had affixed a stigma on his name and history. I believe he is usually regarded as an out-cast, as a sort of wild man, a Bedouin and warrior of the desert. Remembering only one portion of the prophecy concerning him, we attach the term Ishmaelite to any outlaw, and speak of him as "one whose hand is against every man and every man's hand against him"; in fact, we often regard Ishmael as quite out of the range of God's promises and grace, and indeed mostly as one of the bad characters of the Bible. No view can be more incorrect, and even no view can be more contrary to Scripture story, or more calculated to produce misconceptions concerning the laws and the aboundings of Divine grace. Ishmael was the child of prophecy and promise, and those prophecies and promises, so exactly fulfilled even at this day,

constitute one of the testimonies to the infinitely luminous spirit of the word of God.

Before his birth his mother, Hagar, appears in the story as broken-hearted ; and to her God appeared and promised, "Thou shalt bear a son and call his name Ishmael," that is, God hears, God will hear. That vision, that promise touched the poor girl's heart ; she was probably converted to know God there. The expressions recorded are full of beauty and wonder ; "She called the name of the Lord that spake to her, Thou God seest me : for she said, Have I also here looked after Him that seeth me ?"* And he was born, and Abraham, I fancy, loved him well,—perhaps desired that he should stand with Isaac, or even take precedence of Isaac ; and he prayed for him, and God said, "I have heard thee." His name implies that:—Ishmael, "I will multiply him exceedingly ; twelve princes shall proceed from him."† And then came the time when Hagar was compelled to leave the tents of Abraham. She was a dark, proud, Egyptio-Syrian beauty, and no doubt felt secure in the birthright of her son ; lost in the wilderness now she no doubt thought, "Ah, I gave him a wrong name after all ; it ought not to have been Ishmael." The boy—he was a full-grown lad now—seemed dying in the wilderness ; she also was dying in despair. She did not cry to God and accuse Him in her desolation, she simply sat down and wept

* Genesis xvi. 13.

† Genesis xvii. 20.

in her bitterness of soul. She did not *cry* to God ; tears are heard, sometimes they are the best and most real prayers. So God cried to her. Still it was Ishmael, God hears—"For God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is." There was the water ; and forth they went into the wilderness, "and God was with the lad." Yes ; and this wild branch became a great tree, and this fountain of Ishmael was divided into twelve fountains according to the names of his sons.* Every name represents some well-known tribe or nation of Arabia. Isaac and Ishmael met again by their father's grave in the cave of Machpelah.† And at a great age Ishmael died, when his family had spread far through the rocks and sands, the desert and wilderness, and multiplied on every side.

In a very eminent sense Ishmael's history answers to his name, "God will hear." The blessing of God was upon both Isaac and Ishmael, though the blessings were widely different. We may think it would not have been wonderful if it had been said of Isaac God was with *him* ; but it was of Ishmael, who was in the wild state of nature, and was sent out—nay, apparently cast out of his father's house. They, indeed, represent two empires, two natures ; eminently these are two representative men. But of Ishmael, God's promise to bless him and to multiply him was fulfilled to the letter. His mother was the first person of

* Genesis xxv. 12.

† Genesis xxv. 9.

whom we read, I believe, to whom a special angel was sent and in a special manner; he was "covered from the womb," his infancy and his youth were marked, heralded, and accompanied by visible signs of an invisible Providence. God was with him, gave him the water to drink, and wrought through his mother's administration a fine demonstration; hereafter we read that "the Holy One came from Paran, the God of Israel shined from Mount Paran," and this was the possession of one of the descendants of Ishmael. The great probability is that Job was one of the descendants of Ishmael; he was certainly not in the direct line of the church, and the book appears to be written for the very purpose of showing to us how Divine light and Divine grace operate outside the *immediate* kingdom of grace. Nay, it seemed as if the exile and the outcast had the best of it,—as if it was better to be without the covenant than within. Isaac's seems to have been a hard life, in constant conflict with the Philistines; very different, I fancy, were their possessions and lordships as they met at their father's grave. So often it is the case that nature seems so far better than grace. And the generations rolled on, and Isaac had but one son; *he* indeed had twelve, but it seems they thought themselves likely to benefit by exile into Egypt. The way of the special and promised race was quite a circuitous route; that of Ishmael's seems immediate and straightforward prosperity. It was so with Jacob and Esau too; but because I

see the working of the law of the Divine love in the history of Ishmael and his tribes, do not let it be supposed I do not see the difference between the family of the covenant and the blessing which rests on the family of nature. But I would have you to take up and read in this story what are the hopes for Ishmael,—Ishmael, who was the outcast from Abraham's household, although he had received circumcision, the sign of the admission into the family of grace. Now I think we have in the story of God's dealings with Ishmael a very sufficient and illustrative picture of the whole method and plan of grace and the condition of nature,—nature and grace.

In any case, by this story God reveals to us His love and care for outcasts, exiles, banished ones, wanderers. It was so with all of them: it was so with Jacob, a lone wanderer with a stone for a pillow beneath an almond tree; it was so with Joseph; it was so with Abraham himself; Israel was taught to say, "A Syrian ready to perish was my father." The God of the Bible teaches us that He looks after outcasts; it is the same from first to last. Of whom was it said, "This man receiveth sinners"? "Children of disobedience" is a universal designation for all. And the truth is pointed here in the story of Israel: this is not the lesson which especially meets me here, but surely it meets us; and among outcasts what makes us to differ? There are those who arbitrarily mark the distinction, and are not indisposed to say, I am Isaac and

you are Ishmael ! Well, even Ishmael was blessed, for God heard him, and gave to him his name and his place. Nor am I indisposed to remember that there was a difference between Isaac and Ishmael, in the spirit of the old divine, Alexander Gair, who represented the difference between the two in a hypothetical dialogue between Isaac and Ishmael. "*Isaac* said, I have Abraham to my father. *Ishmael*.—So have I. *Isaac*.—I am the child of many prayers. *Ishmael*.—So am I. *Isaac*.—I have received the seal of the covenant in circumcision. *Ishmael*.—So have I. *Isaac*.—But I got a deliverance from heaven. *Ishmael*.—So did I. *Isaac*.—Yes ; but I got my deliverance through sacrifice, and you by a drink from your mother's bottle."

By the fountain of Ishmael, where God hearkened to his prayer and his cry, I read God's care for all—I find that Ishmael also is within the plan of God. A good deal of our regard to Divine truth is national, or notional, or conventional. Let us learn here, that outside of the sphere of the covenant is still within the sphere of Grace or of Providence. No doubt, in the history of Ishmael we read the scheme of nature, while in Isaac we have the principle of Divine election : most true, but you see also that election never means reprobation ; and the story of Ishmael proclaims that God hath not cast off. God elects and determines His witnesses. "Ye are my witnesses, saith God, that I am the Lord." He fixes, He determines that His

name shall be known, His grace recorded, in the men and the deeds of Isaac's posterity. Yes, but in Ishmael's descendants also.

Who was Job?—and what of his book? He did not live within the direct line of the church; his book was not produced within the direct line of the church. I take it to be a proven fact that he was an Ishmaelite, and the book is in harmony with such an idea. It is the voice, it is the cry of nature, it is the wail of nature. There are in it few of the tones of the covenant of grace—I may say, none; there is not a reference to a providential appearance; the writer is unacquainted with all the great interventions of Divine providence. It is the gospel of the Ishmaelite, but it found its way into the sacred archives and heraldries of the people of God; and not without a reason. So also a Balaam knew the Gospel of the peculiar people, and from the elevated peak of prophecy saw gleaming in the distance the destiny of "the people who were to dwell alone and not be reckoned among the nations." We learn how Divine truth found a lodging and a home among tribes not incorporated in the witnessing kingdom.

The principle of the Divine election seems to be this: absolutely God fixes His name and His truth like a pillar, like a rock as in the shifting streams of time. Did He not do this it seems as if the whole race would perish from the very weight of sin; the principle of election is the principle of salvation, it is

the conservation of the race and of truth in the world. Hence it has been ; but what Scripture is it that ever affirms that God has cast off the peoples of the earth? On the contrary, look at these people, the descendants of Ishmael, and truly they do well illustrate that "God heard the voice of the lad." * They had the trade and commerce of the East for ages greatly in their hands ; they had the elegancies and the cultivation of the East ; they had stores of poetry, and stores of truth too. They have been wild, bold warriors, the free lances of the desert,—the great Saracen people : Haroun al Raschid in one age, and Mahomet in another, and Saladin in another. Such were the children of Ishmael. See it all fulfilled in the history of the world. The Jews have given us most,—these are the children of Isaac ; and next these, beyond all doubt those wild children of nature, the Ishmaelites. I read in this story God's use of outcasts in His plans and His purposes. Such is one of the lessons of hope from the fountain of Ishmael, and "the villages that Kedar doth inhabit."

You will not fail to notice that Ishmael was the child of prayers, and you will notice that all the prayers were heard. In this connection his name is wonderful. God heard his father, God heard his mother, and "God heard the voice of the lad" ; and his life was a response to all these prayers, and they

* Genesis. xxi. 17.

must have often seemed, too, as if they were permitted to fall back unnoticed and unclaimed. It was not so. Sometimes we say, "Oh prayers, prayers, whither went ye?—ye have surely missed your way!" You will also not fail to notice how absolute God is in His reply to prayer. Isaac is not to be displaced, nor is Ishmael to be sharer with Isaac in the inheritance. No; all that does not discriminate aright the ideas and the plans of the Divine mind. Ishmael, in his inheritance of the wild blood, the passionate, vehement nature of his mother, her burning eye,—in fact, you see there was wildness there, exactly as in the case of Lot, in the case of Esau,—more especially there was the lawless spirit of the wilderness. Perhaps you will see in this that when we are not conformed to God's way God will meet us and use us in our own. Thou awful mystery of life! But shall I think that exiles from us are exiles from Him? Can there be any soul which has not finally cast Him off with whom He has not something to do? See that group of children playing in the field, gathering round the table, round the winter fireside,—there is an Ishmael there: happy is the home in which there is no Ishmael. Yes, but see,—God gives to you the clue of His providence. The wild nature which seeks the sea, which is at home in the storm, which lives in the bush, in the wilderness, in the African desert, in the New Zealand clearing, in the Australian digging,—the old prayers may ascend and by their electric current, mysterious blessings may

be conveyed, and God may hear, and God may bless the lad ; so those who need it may take a cup of refreshment from the fountain of Ishmael and the tents of Kedar. There is the mighty instinct of the race which pushes out, that, as the race may be borne forward and exhausted on one shore, it may recuperate itself on others : for how true it is weariness does not transmit itself and descend like an inheritance from generation to generation ; how tired soever the age may be, the scion steps forth fresh and young. Wearied as the twelfth century was with the Crusades, it did not interfere with the vitality of the thirteenth century—one of the most vital and seminal times in the ages of the world. Our weariness here does not interfere with the bound of vitality there ; so the people from exile and outcasts renew their strength, and push forth from the tents of home,—they found new colonies, and give conditions for happiness and enjoyment to new regions. It was said, wherever the Roman conquers he inhabits ; and with one or two exceptions this may most truly be said of the Englishman, and the most unlikely regions are “sown with the seed of man and the seed of beasts” by the Ishmaelites and outcasts of civilization.

There is a fourth remark, but I have left myself no time to dwell on it ; it refers to the lesson of the whole, and would break up altogether a new chain and train of thought ; it refers to the mystical standing and character of Ishmael and Isaac. They

are two empires. You see God sent Isaac,—he was born amidst all the purposes of prophecy; and Ishmael came in the way of nature. He was the son of the bondwoman; and there is and ever will be a great difference between what God gives in His own creating grace and what He meets in the way of nature to overrule and bless. Those who take the wild Hagar to wife will be sure to have Ishmaels for sons. Hence society is full of Ishmaels.

Wonderful old Bible! Its lore grows upon me more and more, and I visit it as a shrine full of Divine relics to worship, and as a museum of antiquities to stir my wonder, and as a guide and a map to inquire.

XII.

Ramah, the Village of the Seer.

“A voice was heard in Ramah.”—JEREMIAH xxxi. 15.

THERE are mentioned in the Bible many villages to us obscure as to their locality; and yet we are to speak upon them, because there was a day in their history when they were not obscure, and because, in the light of the events which transpired in their neighbourhood, or the characters who were born and resided within them, they shone forth with extraordinary lustre. But it is with places as with persons, as “unknown yet well known.” Individuals have been handed down to history, their deeds mentioned from page to page, whose names are yet quite unknown. We know neither the name of the old nor the young prophet whose affecting story is told in the First Book of Kings; the Syro-Phœnician woman comes before us without a name; we do not know the name of Pilate’s wife; we do not know the name of the good thief. History recites the instances of men who have saved cities, but their names are unknown

although their deeds are recorded ; like that lame old gatekeeper of Bois-le-Duc, with whose action perhaps, in the result of it, neither the present writer nor reader has much sympathy, who just struggled from his bed to shut to the gates, to ring the bell and rouse his party to arms, and then crept back to his bed ; and having performed this his little achievement, laid him down that night and died—his name to all historians apparently quite unknown. And so it is with places : some gleam out by a single action or character for a moment on the disc of history, and then, after that instant of illumination, they sink back again into obscurity and are seen no more. But such places shine like some of the imaginary villages or spots with which the poet charms us in the pages of fiction ; doubtless even these had more than an ideal existence in the poet's mind,—he had seen their like, and he described them ; and of those no longer to be with any distinctness identified, the circumstances which happened in them and have given to them their fame were real enough.

Where was Libnah ? Where is its site ? That it was one of the nine royal cities in the days of Joshua by no means assures us that its size was of equal importance to its situation. We know how frequently it is the case, that some little border town or city, like Geneva, holds royalties in itself arising from its position ; so Libnah, on the borders of Judah, Israel, Philistia, and Egypt herself—the little town appa-

rently, as Thomas Fuller says, taking its cordial of self-subsistence from the very poison of its enemies. And it was against Libnah that Sennacherib encamped, and against Libnah he sent his railing accusation and command to surrender; but we have no reason to suppose that the brave little place was taken. It was round Libnah that the array of the one hundred and eighty-five thousand soldiers was spread out; and it was to save Libnah and, through that little town, all Israel, that—

“The angel of death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed.
And *there* lay the rider, distorted and pale,
With the dew on his brow and the rust on his mail;
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,
Hath melted like snow at the glance of the Lord.”

Where was Emmaus? Dr. Robertson confesses himself unable to authenticate its site. Yet, although the glimpse we obtain of it is so slight and evanescent, what village is more interesting? Some travellers believe they have still followed the path trodden by those desponding disciples when that mysterious stranger crossed their way. We should like to identify the scene of that sweet episode, the spot of that interview which hallowed that solemn eventide of the first Christian Sabbath-day. And it was near Jerusalem, but it is an obscure village.

There is another and even a yet more interesting

place, judging it by its human interests and associations,—Ramah, Ramathaim-Zophim ; in fact, perhaps, two villages. Tradition for a long time held this place to be identical with Ramleh ; but Dr. Robertson seems to have disproved this identification, if not quite to the satisfaction of all readers, sufficiently to disturb certainty. He has judged it probable that Ramah was more likely the present Soba, and has vindicated the probability with some ingenuity. Ramah was the birthplace of Samuel ; it was the spot of many striking and tender incidents in his illustrious life ; it was the home of the prophet. “Wherever it was,” says Thomas Fuller, “it was the place where Samuel was born wonderfully, lived unblamably, and died peaceably, and was buried honourably.” And other singular memories point out this place as one to which we may travel to obtain lessons not uninteresting to us. Is it not sweet sometimes to visit a prophet’s home ? Have I not before said, the place seems to retain something of its ancient life ? There are those even who go on pilgrimages sometimes to see the ground over which some beloved feet walked. So I have visited the little village, Bemerton, where George Herbert lived his holy, simple life, and wrote his quaint, his sweetly fanciful and instructive metres. So I walked to the golden grove in Carmarthenshire, where Jeremy Taylor passed his years of obscurity, preached his sermons ; and, above all, where he wrote his “Liberty of Pro-

phesying"; and, alas! I found the plough had passed over "Taylor's Walk," every brick of the church in which he preached had been pulled down, and his pulpit had been used for firewood. But pleasant it is to realize the spots where prophets have lived and spoken. I have many times walked from Ulverstone to Swarthmoor Hall, to see the house where George Fox found rest and quiet, and some freedom from persecution after his many years of wanderings and imprisonment; and I stood in the old oriel window looking out amongst the trees which must have been standing when he stood there, when he poured out his words over the crowds assembled below, and even raised and carried the people along with him in the notes of sacred hymns. It is surely very sweet to visit and to realize the haunts of old prophet men. Kidderminster must look very unlike what it was in Richard Baxter's day; but I have never visited it or looked upon its old church, however changed, without thinking of him and Margaret Charlton, and feeling as if some gales from the "Saints' Everlasting Rest" blew past my spirit. The spirit of Doddridge still lingers in the fields and walks about Northampton; we still seem to meet Cowper at Olney, and Young at Welwyn, and James Hervey at Weston-Favel. So singular is that law of association which makes men shrine-seekers!

But in the case of Samuel, the great Hebrew seer and prophet, we are unable very clearly to follow him

to his homes and haunts ; thus we see the history of his age is full of him. In that history of the Jews, in which we have such an astonishing succession of great characters, genius and strength so mighty and manifold—while some perhaps are grander, presenting, like David, a more epical structure, or, like Solomon, a more gorgeous embodiment—there is none more interesting and, from some points of view, more imposing. And we should like to follow him to the little village where he was born and where his days of peaceful power were passed, through times so turbulent and troublesome : perhaps the very name of his home may blend a difficulty with its identity ; Ramah signifies the Height, or the High Place ; it was probably a hill rising from some surrounding plain ; and travellers perhaps do not sufficiently remember, that while we are not always to expect in the name of a place its local attributes, it will perhaps usually be so. The designation Ramah, then, might have been one often repeated ; as we find in our own and other countries, a local characteristic causes a frequent repetition. It matters little to the present paper, nor does it matter in general materially ; for the spirit can visit places the eyes are unable to see. This Ramah, wherever it was, would seem to have possessed something special and peculiarly spiritual in its very atmosphere. I cannot but think there are such spots. If, as we know is the case, certain bodily conditions form a happy assenting vehicle through

which the soul can pass and speak, or through which the ministrations of external nature may reach the soul, may it not very naturally be so also with the surrounding region? There are places not like other places: they seem to have possessed some happy mixture of atmosphere favourable to the production of great souls; we might almost say this is the case with nations and peoples in general. There is scarce another spot on the face of the earth like Florence: the little city seems to possess a prophetic air; it was the soil and the inspiration of genius. But the same remark holds true of other spots and places, and seems almost to account for natural divergences and differences of character. Around Ramah a prophetic air hung; it is revealed in the mother of Samuel, who lived there with her husband—"a woman of a sorrowful spirit," pensive, but elevated in the strain and stress of her thought and feeling. Her beautiful hymn shows that—a floating flakelet of sweet old Hebrew melody; you may call it an earlier Magnificat. Like the virgin mother of our Lord, the mother of Samuel seems to move before us with considerable distinctness as the singer of that sweet and sacred hymn, "a voice from Ramah," in the very oldest times. And then, by-and-by, it became the home of the inspired and nervous prophet, and then the school of the prophets, amidst whose ranks there seemed to move and swell some great utterances of inspiration and melody. Then the singular circumstance is, that

in that neighbourhood Saul himself is caught and impressed by the spirit of "the band of men who went with him, whose hearts God had touched," and he began to prophesy; so that it became a proverb, arising from the incident of the place, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

The air of the place seems to have been prophetic: such a remark follows upon that I made just now. Are there not places which wither all the blossoms, the spirituality, the devotion, genius, inspiration? The best emotions of the heart cannot grow there; life is robbed of its glory and its charm by some ministering spirit of materialism, of craft with indifference. Men move on with a kind of Divine life of duty there, but life in its ecstasy and its elevation is unknown. It would be invidious to mention such places; they exist,—we have breathed the air of them. What! do we not know of places like the famous Italian grotto, into which, if you plunge animal life, or which, if you attempt to breathe yourself, all the senses are benumbed, the atmosphere heavy and saturnine? And do we not know that there are keen, refreshing, exciting airs, so living and life-giving that we must perforce sing and shout, or even sob for very joy? At any rate, this Ramah seems to have answered to some such ideas; it was as if its visitors drank in prophetic inspiration from its heights, and became other men. It was here that we read of Saul, "He became another man," "he

had another heart." Ramah has been regarded as a Hebrew university ; here Samuel, it is supposed from the long course of tradition, gave to the people the first schools of the prophets ; so he attempted to commence the work of national regeneration. He gave to them the harp and the flute. A distinguished scholar of our times supposes that David himself received his education at Ramah. "I do not see," says Dr. Payne Smith, "how David could have learned to read and write, except in Samuel's schools. His skill in music may also have been acquired there."*

Such are some of the first circumstances which create in our minds a pleasing interest in this spot, whose height and fountain are like a Hebrew Parnassus and Helicon. Wherever Ramah was, it is introduced to us in one of those sweet, concise, but charming pictures so frequent in the Bible. Saul and his servants are in perplexity concerning the asses they had gone to seek ; they appear to have lost their way, and to be in a dilemma. Food had failed them, and we may suppose money too, for the servant tells Saul that he has a fourth part of a shekel of silver : "that will I give to the man of God to tell us our way ;" for he had just before remembered that they were near the residence of Samuel. "There is," said the

* "Prophecy a Preparation for Christ" : Bampton Lecture for 1869. By R. Payne Smith, D.D.

servant, "in this city a man of God, and he is an honourable man ; all that he saith cometh surely to pass : now let us go thither ; most likely he can show us our way that we should go." All this was well thought of, so Saul said, " Well said ; come, let us go." And they went up the hill to the village ; and here we have what plainly gives the name of the place, Ramah, the village on the heights. It seems indeed probable that there were two hills, one above the other ; but the village was on the hill beneath, and Samuel's house on a height over the lower hill. Ramah-Zophim would seem to indicate this, as well as all the pieces of the story. As they went on their way through the village, gathered round the fountain or the well they found young maidens drawing water ; and the belated travellers said, " Is the seer here ?" For, as the judge, we are told how Samuel left home at different periods of the year to hold his assize-courts in the several other central places of the land. The maidens replied, " The seer is at home." And it is at this point a most striking and interesting remark is made, apparently quite incidentally in the story. It is a history ; and names, in the course of time between the happening of this little rural yet historical incident, had changed. " Beforetime in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, thus he spake, Come, and let us go to the seer : for he that is now called a Prophet was beforetime called a Seer." We have a change exactly like it in language in our

own country: before the Conquest, the concourse of legislation was called the Witenagemot—that is, the Assembly of Wise Ones; since the Conquest it has been called the Parliament—that is, the Assembly of the Talking Ones. It is true there were seers after Samuel; but it seems in his day that was the distinctive attribute and characteristic of the prophetic man—he was one who sees; a grand attribute indeed, defining one who had clear insight into the laws and roots of things—a man with a Divine second sight. Such was Samuel; and thus his residence on the high place over Ramah was a mountain of vision known to all the country round; and while he had his seasons during which he visited the central cities to sit in the chair of judgment, men sought him and came to his house for counsel and for wisdom because he was the seer. So the damsels by the well replied to the young men, “You are just in time, the seer has just arrived home, he came to-day, for there is a sacrifice of the people to-day in the high place; you will find him in the lower village if you make haste now, before he go up to the high place to eat, for the people will not eat until he come, because he doth bless the sacrifice, and afterwards those that are invited dine with him. If you make haste you will find him about this very time.” So the young men hastened on; and just as they reached the village Samuel was coming forth to go up to the high place. The two or three words I have altered in narrating this story only seem to me

to set it in a more clear and distinct light. Then came the moment of seership, and in that upland village Samuel knew that he met the man who was to be Israel's first king. Into that story we have not to enter now, further than to say that the whole course of the story shows, or seems to show, that there were two elevations. The travellers went up a hill to the village, and then they ascended again to another height above the village—the house of Samuel as well as the sacred ministering-place of the prophet and high-priest of God ; unless, indeed, we may suppose—for the story leaves either supposition free—that the sacred place stood by itself alone on the heights, as we read of their coming down from the high place again into the village ; and then, as Samuel and Saul left the village, we read again of their going down to the end of the village, at whose foot, in some still, lonely place, the servant was commanded to go on while the great seer and judge took Saul aside, poured a vial of oil upon his head, and said, "Is it not because the Lord hath anointed thee captain over His inheritance?" An astonishing event indeed in the life of the young man who set forth to find his father's asses, and found a kingdom on the way. So, for good or ill, it has often happened that men, in seeking for one thing, have found another. Where this Ramah was, has been confessed perhaps the greatest perplexity in the map and topography of the Holy Land ; but perhaps, if these particulars of

the locality had been more distinctly watched, and the necessity for a double height, a true Ramah-Zophim, had been looked for, it might have simplified and drawn into a narrower circle and limited the number of the places which seem to present a claim to the honour of that distinguished prophetic residence and that first coronation ; and after all, perhaps that theory which finds it at El-Fureidis, the eminent and celebrated Frank mountain, about six miles from Jerusalem, may present a stronger claim than has by some writers been supposed. Wherever it was, what a venerable and beautiful aspect it has, invested with these old village circumstances, these leaflets of old tradition and strokes of history—the home of a great and eminently good, wise man, a height on which he lived who was the great reformer of his times, the holy and stern yet peaceful patriot, pre-eminently beyond all other men the seer of his day—the place to which he retreated for Divine communion, refreshment and re-invigoration ! The hospitable priest of God—for in this light the story seems plainly to present him—known to be accessible to the inquiries of the humblest ; for it was not thought at all a strange thing that a pair of peasants should have an interview with him, and it seems to be expected that he would invite the wayfarers to dine and rest with him before they departed.

And there, when the great man died, all Israel gathered together, the representatives of the nation ;

there, upon the heights of Ramah, they buried him, in his house at Ramah, in some sweet spot, some garden seclusion overshadowed by the brooding and meditative trees beneath whose shades the prophet had walked and held his conferences and communions with Divine things. There "all Israel made great lamentation over him," as well they might,—the hoary old man who had heard the voice of God calling him when he was a little child, who had listened and followed the Divine leadings, who had begun and carried forward the great work of national regeneration, who, although no warrior, appears to have been able to somewhat break the power of Philistine invaders—the stern republican, who said more tremendous things about kings, and gave a more tremendous picture of what kings would dare to do, than any other writer, inspired or uninspired; but the man who was able to perceive that if the people would not be wise in their democracy they must yield themselves to the strength of a competent despotism—the man of mighty eloquence and mighty prayer, who, like others of those great Hebrew prophets, seemed by his power of prayer to hold the thunders and the lightnings and the rains of heaven in his words. How great must Ramah have been, how sacred that house, that spot behind the mantling trees which held such a man as this living, and inurned his ashes when dead!

How great is the power of goodness! It consecrates

and sets apart a village as a place to be loved and visited. Great moments of state there are, when the people throng out by some government command as to a show ; when banners wave down the streets, and trumpets blare, and drums beat. But in our own times we have seen some other sights, when a great, good man has been borne to his burial, and when, by an act of will and love, the whole of a large town has put on mourning, and all shops have closed, and the bells poured out their muffled tone, and silently and lovingly the long procession of unpaid mourners has poured upon its way, because the great, good man is being carried to his rest. Some such spectacle must have been seen at Ramah on the occasion of the funeral of Samuel.

Ramah has ever been considered as identical with Arimathea ; and, like Ramah, Arimathea perplexes the sacred topographers, but the names are synonymous—the double height. It does not seem probable that Arimathea could have been far from Jerusalem ; and there lived another worthy of sacred story, Joseph—most certainly a rich man, a man who had his possessions in Ramah ; the name in the New Testament history occurs but once, and in connection with him. Shall we not call him a seer too, who was able to see his Saviour when those who had been nearer to Him doubted and forsook Him ; who was able to see his Saviour in the bloody, bruised, and mangled body of Jesus when it was taken from the

cross; and in whom was fulfilled that ancient and hallowed prophecy concerning our Lord, that if He should die with the wicked He should find His grave with the rich? Such, we may be sure, is the true reading and intention of the prophecy "that He made His grave with the wicked and with the rich in His death." Therefore the rich man Joseph, when the body was taken down from the cross, consigned it to his own family sepulchre, newly hewn, but wherein no man had lain. Had he too been a friend of Jesus? Had Jesus visited him at Arimathea? Had He trodden those heights and drunk from the waters of that well? We know not that; but the whole act speaks out a heart full of love to the Saviour—a consecrating, delicate, reverent love. We read of one who was "a disciple of Jesus, but secretly"; this it seems can scarcely have been his character. But if at a distance he had watched or had reverently listened, undecided whether to join with his followers or not, it says everything for him that at the time when the clouds seemed to fall upon the cause of Christ, when for a moment desertion of friends, and death from foes met Him, to consummate His Divine career and to make the Captain of our Salvation perfect, then was the moment when faith in Jesus leaped up hearty and ardent, and he stepped forth to give his character and name, and of his wealth to the crucified body of "the Man of Sorrows." What a tender attractiveness this incident hangs round the little village! And so they

both drift out of sight. With certainty we know nothing more of the place or the person; only this—we are sure they both were, sure that he who loved and revered the dead body could not less love and revere the risen Lord, and, returning to his home, his trees and fields, would find it a rich consolation that his had been the grave whose seals had been broken by the Divine Majesty as He took again the life He had “laid down,” his had been the sacred enclosure which had been glorified by that pair of bright ones who had been seen sitting “the one at the head and the other at the feet where the body of Jesus had lain.”

XIII.

The Village on the Sea-Cliffs.

“ But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land ; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow.”—LUKE iv. 25-26.

THERE is a most wonderful interest in the introduction of this singular old seaport, or village on the shore. It did not, and does not, belong to the villages of the Holy Land ; it belonged to Phœnicia, —it was peopled by a race of most cruel idolaters ; and yet how plainly it is enfolded in the Divine love and the purposes of God ! Sarepta, or Zarephath, was a village on the maritime plain, but beyond the inheritance of the tribe of Asshur—a little village on a famous spot in the neighbourhood of Tyre and Sidon, on the fine sea-board of the Mediterranean, the most historical of all the waters of the globe.

A village on the sea-shore and by the sea ; sand, and shingle, and rocks : we know what these mean to

visit them, to be recreated, to dream, to sketch ; but how different to dwell there ! For there is a dreadful fascination in the sea ; all people seek it, but nothing else in nature so overawes, so overwhelms the soul, nothing else in nature seems so fairly to master us : the sea coils like a cruel sinister serpent round the globe ; sometimes the waters smile, sometimes they snarl, they are always cruel ; the sea is the greatest mystery of nature.

A walk by the sea-shore : why should the prophet travel all the way to Sarepta ? Human life, is not its sustenance more precarious by the sea-side than anywhere else ? Inhospitable cliffs, the only walls against inhospitable waves, where man snatches a scanty subsistence from an incessant wrestling with the sea, where often his proud frigates are hurled upon the shore or sucked in beneath the rolling seas. And there sweep the waves, rolling over the wealth of merchants, the swords of heroes ; helms which had steered adventurer's ships round the wide world but had sunk at last ; anchors which never let go their hold in storms, and anchor and ship lying foundered below there. Truly has the sea been called a hidden Golgotha.*

There were—I believe there are still—two ways to Sarepta : the higher and the lower road, across the plain and beneath the cliff. It is most certain that

* Victor Hugo, "The Toilers of the Sea."

Elijah trod the upper way ; famine spread all around him ; upon the fields, instead of the bladed grass,

“ Lay the white scurf as on a leper’s face ; ” *

and as he passed along we may be sure “ all the villages stood still as tombs,” for famine was everywhere ; it was in the depths of the silent hills, and in the mountain or the plain all the wells were dry, and the famine had drunk up the moisture from the earth and the spring.

“ I have commanded a widow woman to sustain thee there.” What is the story of Sarepta, and what does the old seaport say ? It says even the same old thing we have heard so often, that man’s extremity is God’s opportunity. The prophet comes this way footsore and weary, his heart breaking for Israel, his soul full of indignation against Israel’s king, full of scorn against Israel’s queen,—something of doubt even concerning the Divine ruling: “ I only am left alone ; where is the Lord God of Elijah ? ” And the only reply, the melancholy beat of the sea-waves dashing against the cliffs. No ; perhaps rather beneath that cruel sky, the sea itself, like a dread, shining slimy serpent—a sea, too, awfully becalmed :—

“ Every day
The sunrise, broken into scarlet shafts
Among the palms and ferns and precipices ;
The blaze upon the waters to the east,

* Peter Bayne, “ The Days of Elijah.”

The blaze upon the waters to the west,
Or the low moan of leaden-coloured seas.*

And there, as he approaches the famine-stricken village, the woman gathering her sticks—he a famished body and famished heart, she mourning over her little breadless household. Says she, “Ah, he knows nothing of the agony of a widow’s heart,” and he, “Ah, she knows nothing of the heavy burden of the prophet of the Lord.” Thus it has often been a way of God to bring, as at Sarepta, burdened hearts together; they shall do each other good, those two; though most likely their intellectual and moral stature are so different, they shall avail for each other, be useful to each other; the prophet shall be very much to the Sareptan woman, and by-and-by she will forget, as people usually forget, what the prophet has been,—when the prophet begins to be misunderstood.

But Sarepta, that old seaport,—what an unlikely place! Yet there, in that strange retreat, beneath the very shadows of the darkest idolatry, he walked to and fro; for the melancholy of the sea has a way even of extracting the melancholy from a moody man and mind by ministering to it, and by driving it on itself, arming it, and charging it, and giving purpose to it. And there stretched the Mediterranean, its waters washing yonder Isle of Tyre—an island then—and

* Tennyson, “Enoch Arden.”

Africa, and Spain, and Italy so near ; yonder it went on, forming then the delta of the Adriatic for the foundations of a city, the mighty Venice, which shall rise there, and plunge up to the future gulf. Did the prophet's eye of second sight greet all the future ? Did the curtains draw up from before those mighty, to us ancient, sea-margins ? Perhaps to some in that day history seemed old ; to us those times seem almost like the childhood of history, and the platforms preparing, the great historical peoples mustering, who were yet to create what we call history.

So he walked by the cliffs, and through the combs. And I think the stern prophet relaxed his severity—there was a child in the poor little household, the widow's son ; and I think the story seems to speak as if there had grown up some affection between these two, the prophet and the child—as if the stern prophet relaxed his severity when the widow's little son was by his side in his wanderings, his companion and his guide too, as such little things can be to world-wearied, morbid men. I dare not say that we can always rely upon that which tradition teaches us, but very old traditions identify this little lad, and give to him a name, a very natural, beautiful name for a child in such a scene. A widow, a young widow, living there, we may be sure with instincts and tendernesses which passed beyond her race and clime ; to her and to her husband there came this little minister of domestic peace, this light to their Phœnician home. It is said

they called his name *Jonah*; truly a beautiful name, whatever may be our associations with it. *The dove*,—a sweet name for a child, a bright little lovable one, filling, hovering over, and making yet more glad the scenery of peace. And then, in a dark hour, the husband, the woman's stay and staff, was snatched away, and she, in her lone cottage on the melancholy cliffs, left alone; but her little dove was left her still, to be her comfort and her care. And there still stepped on the dark hours; famine came, and she was a widow, and finding it hard at the best to sustain her life and her child with her grief, and darkness, and scanty means; the time of famine came, and then all seemed lost,—no help, no hope; less and less grew the means, and probably all other human life had ebbed away from her village; but she, whither should she fly? Her neighbours had travelled hither and thither, wandering far, if possible to pass beyond the bounds of the famine-stricken region; she was alone, she knew not whither to bend her steps. But her solitude made a fine retreat for the exiled prophet, the banished and persecuted man; so as he came a modest plenty came back to the widow's household, the mother's heart perceived that in her little home she had a prophet of the Lord, for the barrel of meal was inexhaustible and the cruse of oil was always sufficient; and the man of God and her dove they brooded about the place together,—the wise, great man full of kind and tender thoughts and things for his

little companion, and the little lad full of love and wonder for the mysterious man who had made his mother's heart glad again, and had increased their little store.

And now Sarepta became the scene of one of those few struggles with death in which the prophets of the Lord in those old days were permitted, on a smaller scale, to anticipate His power "who has the keys of hell, or death," and the grave. The little lad sickened and died. Fancy that mother's wretchedness: innumerable mothers since then have known it all, but that does not make it the less wretched or the less affecting. Her dove snatched away from her, the last link with her past life, the solace of her widowed life,—her all. By a strange perversity of reasoning not uncommon in like instances, she involved her benefactor, Elijah, in the doom which saddened her little household on the shore; she seemed to suppose that in some way the prophet had sinned in coming to her and her house. It almost seems as if he even thought so himself; it seems as if the disposition in her to charge him foolishly met a similar disposition in the prophet to charge God foolishly. And then came the strange conflict between death and life. Very significant that in the prophet's case it was by no means the easy task it was to the Lord of life; not "My little one, or my dear one, I say unto thee arise," but a conflict with death, as if hand to hand, on the stern, dark battle-ground, the putting forth all

the might of prayer and all the energy of the prophetic nature. And the victory was won, and the child was restored to his mother, and she said, "Now by this I know that thou art a man of God." As if she had not evidence enough before; but the evidences are so bright when circumstances please us, and when the circumstances are dark it is even as hard as to read the sweetest letter from the most affectionate friend beneath the midnight heavens. Old Jewish traditions identify the little child so marvellously restored to life with the prophet Jonah; certainly the prophet Jonah appears to have belonged to this immediate neighbourhood. The same traditions tell us that the child became the attendant of Elijah into the wilderness, that it was he by whose hand Elijah anointed Jehu the prophet, the same who in after years hurried to the sea-side and took ship to escape his mission, the prophet of Nineveh, the morbid prophet of the wail and the gourd, the subject of one of the most startling, and stupendous, and comprehensive prophecies of the book of God. Singular if it should be so: thus tradition speaks, but the vesture of tradition, even with this light upon it, scarcely increases the beauty of the story in itself; such a weird reality gathers round it, so illustrative of the darkness of the scenery and the tenderness of the incident which meets and gives a gentle and pathetic light to the lonely cottage on the shore.

That old village on the sea-cliffs was one of the

instances selected by our Lord to illustrate, as in a great diagram, the large and quite unecclesiastical character and intention of His love,—Sarepta. But it is more remarkable that He should have in this neighbourhood given a similar illustration Himself ; * it was perhaps the solitary instance of His overstepping the limits of the Holy Land, and it is believed to have been about this very spot, there met Him a woman of Syro-phœnicia—that is, a Phœnician of Syria in contradistinction to the Phœnicians of Africa ; and she, a stranger, passing right through all ecclesiastical usages and church doctrines, setting aside every tentative and hypothetical objection He raised evidently to try her and instruct us ; appealed at once to the Saviour's heart, and did not appeal in vain. This is the Divine lesson of the doctrine of election as taught by our Lord ; and these two noble mothers were chosen to preach to us the great lesson of faith and its blessing even on heathen hearts and lives. Well has the seraphic Fletcher of Madely put it in words Dr. Stanley quotes in this very connection : “Get quite from under your parched gourd of reprobation, let not your eye be evil because God is good, nor fret like Jonah because the Father of Mercies exhibits His compassion even to all. To the village of Sarepta, to the region of Syro-phœnicia, even to Nineveh itself.”

Such are the lessons from the old village on the

* Mark vii. 26.

sea-cliffs in the neighbourhood of Tyre ; there, indeed,—

“ The old, old sea, as one in tears,
Comes murmuring with its sorrowing lips,
And, knocking at the vacant piers,
Calls for her long-lost multitude of ships.”

But these stories survive, other traditions have passed away, the palms have passed away which gave the name of the Phoenix to the place,—Phœnicia, that is, the region of the palms. Strange legends have haunted the spot : our St. George of England is fabled to have fought the famous dragon at Sarepta, and his fame lingers there still ; and over the spot where Elijah is said to have lived, there is a cave where an ineffable splendour is still said to burn. All that is myth, perhaps it is allegory, perhaps the light of incident shines like a dimly apprehended parable through these extravagant stories ; not so these Divine facts, wonderful and yet such commonly renewed and natural teachings : these shine like ever-burning lamps along those Phœnician shores. How that there is no extremity God cannot in His grace overtake ; how His love goes beyond our church walls to His dark heathen family ; how precious is the power of faith ; above all, how sovereign is their victory who go straight to the heart of Christ and trust it amidst all seeming contradictions ; how circumstances sometimes are a mask, forbidding and repulsive, and how behind their frown-

ing there is a face of ineffable beauty and tenderness; such are the lessons which meet us from those solitary and deserted shores. The palm and the herbage have withered, but the word of our God in these stories of His grace endures for ever.

XIV.

Provisions for Village Life in the Bible.

"I will go up to the land of the unwall'd villages ; I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates."—EZEKIEL xxxviii. 14.

PALESTINE itself, compared with the great nations around it, and the peoples of the ancient world, was but as a village,—“Lo, the people shall dwell alone, and not be reckoned among the nations,”—it was isolated and it was pastoral. There were towns, of course, but all the arrangements of nature were for village life, and life was sustained by the fruitful field ;—“the people rode on the high places of the earth, that they might suck honey out of the cliff and oil out of the flinty rock, butter of kine and milk of sheep with fat of lambs, and rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats with the fat of kidneys,—of wheat, and the pure blood of the grape,”—this constituted the wealth of Palestine, and such wealth can only exist in villages ; the creation of such supplies is only consistent with the large dissemination of village life—small communities. The richest Israelites appear to

have been extensive graziers, shepherds ; from the earliest records of the people, we have the stories of a simple state of society in which man and nature lived not remotely from each other but on good terms together. It may be said that the whole law of the Land and the Book was constructed for small communities : there were larger gatherings of people, but the provisions were made for small and scattered peoples.

Even the domestic creatures of Palestine show this. It is impossible to think of the village of Palestine without calling up the image of the camel—that singular item of Hebrew wealth. Palgrave, in his charming delineations of “Eastern travel in the Desert,” deals very severely with the moral nature of the camel ; he says, however, he once heard an Arab exclaim, “God created the Bedowin for the camel, and the camel for the Bedowin.” This is even wonderfully true. The breeding of the horse was apparently repressed ; the horse was unknown in Arabia until the history of Israel had far advanced ; it was not a domestic animal in general at any time.* In the writings of Moses we never find horses mentioned ; indeed the ass, with us so despised, was the royal animal ; but the camel is so wonderful in its adaptation and conformation to its external world, that its

* See the interesting Dissertation by Michaelis on the most ancient history of horses and horse breeding in Palestine, Egypt, and Arabia. —“Commentaries on the Laws of Moses,” vol. ii.

existence there almost redeemed the traveller Volney from his infidelity, when he says, "The nature of the camel must have been adapted to the climate by some *disposing intelligence*." Were the desert deprived of the camel it would certainly lose every inhabitant. Every view of the domestic life of Palestine must be inadequate which does not include the camel. The creature is one of the great provisions of Providence for that nomadic village life which we realise in the Bible story. The camel renders habitable the most desert soil the world contains. He is concealed in the depths of the desert, destitute of herbage, where therefore no game can exist, and where for the same reason no voracious wild creatures, such as the lion or the tiger, would be likely to roam. As the creature has nothing of the fleshiness of the ox, the horse, or the elephant, so it has neither the horn of the bull, the hoof of the horse, the tooth of the elephant, nor the swiftness of the stag; it appears to have a capacity for cruel revenge, but to be entirely destitute of the weapons of attack or defence possessed by other creatures. There is not a muscle which is not as distinctly arranged for motion as is the rigging of a ship; his jaw will grind the hardest aliments, but the stomach is contracted so that it must chew the cud; nor is the foot less curious, lined with its singular lump of flesh and fitted alike for a dry, level, sandy, or even muddy soil. Yet the creature supplies all its master's wants, the nourishment of curds, cheese, and butter; even shoes and

harness are made from his skin, and tents and clothing from his hair. He is so strong as to transport immense burdens, and where it would be impossible for the horse to subsist, there the camel, upon a few stalks of bramble or wormwood or pounded date-kernels, not only finds a home, but even supplies deficiencies by her milk. Well might Volney find "a disposing intelligence" in all this. The way in which the camel provokes his masters is most amusing to read of, when we have not suffered from him. The judgment pronounced upon the creature by Lieutenant Lynch is even more severe than that of Mr. Palgrave. Roused to indignation, apparently, he exclaims, "Of all the burden-bearing beasts, from the Siam elephant to the Himmaleh goat, this 'ship of the desert,'—as he has been poetically termed,—this clumsy-jointed, splay-footed, wry-necked, vicious camel, with its look of injured innocence and harsh complaining voice, is incomparably the most disagreeable! The steady little donkey, with preposterous ears and no perceptible hair on his hide, that leads the trudging caravan, and eats his peck of barley—if he be a lucky donkey—and travels stoutly all day long, is a model for him in endurance; and the most unhappy mule that ever bore pack, or blindfold turns the crank of Persian water-wheel, is an example to him of patient meekness and long-suffering. While on the road *they* do not loiter on the way, dropping *their* loads and trespassing upon the fields of grain; while the camel, with

his hypocritical meek look, his drunken eye, and sunken nether lip, begins to expostulate in a voice discordant with mingled hatred and complaint, from the moment he is forced upon his callous knees, until he clumsily rises with his burden, and goes stalking lazily on his road. The meek, enduring look of the camel is a deception; we have seen it refuse the load, and, shaking it off, rise with a roar, and dash furiously at its master, even while its lip was reeking with the fresh and juicy herb he had just gathered for it." This is a delicious piece of abuse. We should like, however, to hear the camel's account of the matter; but in any case it is this wonderful monster who makes the deserts habitable, and proclaims a providence in the provision for the villages of Arabia.

It is undoubted that Moses not only gave to the Israelites, as our Lord tells us, the best laws they were capable of, considering the hardness of their hearts—laws founded in expediency; but laws, too, framed upon their peculiar exigencies as a nation. Hence the provisions for village life distinctly discountenanced the cultivation of commerce. It was only in the age of Solomon,—and that age looked toward the decay and decline of the Hebrew people,—that the arts of commerce and international traffic were cultivated; agriculture was the foundation of the whole Mosaic polity; it was truly a rural and pastoral community. The language of the later prophet, "Learn not the ways of the heathen," may be taken as expressing the spirit

of the Mosaic code. Every tribe, and consequently the whole community, constituted a commonwealth of herdsmen and farmers. It was perhaps the purest democracy the world has ever seen—utterly unlike the democracies and republics of Greece, or Rome, or Italy, and in its outline rather resembling the *theory* of the constitution of the United States. Provision, indeed, was made for one great literary and religious order,—the Levites and their tribe; but they did not constitute an aristocracy. Thus all the provisions of the law were for small communities; and everywhere the enactments seemed to reverence the rights of man as man. It seems even probable that every Israelite born inherited a piece of land from his forefathers. The Hebrew peasant was not such a one as we are accustomed, from the arrangements of modern Europe, to associate with that name; but rather resembled the stout burghers of the cities of the middle ages;* and we know very well how in very small and scattered communities a national spirit may be indeed best sustained. So has it been in the small scattered commonwealth of Switzerland, which seems to bear considerable resemblance to Israel during the days of its judges. A national spirit pervaded Israel: frequently oppressed and crushed, some great leader from one or the other of the lone villages was con-

*. See the Remarks of Michaelis in his "Commentaries on the Laws of Moses," vol. i.

stantly springing forth, to hurl back the tide of invasion and to deliver the people. Especially true of the Hebrew commonwealth is that which the poet Thomson has said of the men of ancient Rome:—

In ancient times, the sacred plow employed
The kings and awful fathers of mankind :
And some, with whom compared your insect tribes
Are but the beings of a summer day,
Have held the scale of empire, rul'd the storm
Of mighty war ; then with victorious hand,
Disdaining little delicacies, seized
The plow, and, greatly independent, scorned
All the vile stores corruption can bestow.*

The Bible,—the books of the Old and New Testament, which have been so often the subjects of the hatred of the poor,—is full of tender reverence and regard for them. The Bible is the book of the poor; the Bible vindicates the cause of the poor; the Bible has enactments for the poor, and it puts the claims which the poor have upon society less upon the grounds of pity than of justice. It has been noticed by eminent Hebrew scholars and critics that in many instances the Hebrew word translated righteousness is rather, as it is even rendered by the Seventy, alms, or good deeds. And thus the word occurs in many texts.†

It is undoubted that the Bible cares for the poor; yet I have been amazed how little this fact is noticed,

* Thomson's "Seasons" :—Spring.

† See, for instance, Deut. xxiv. 13 ; Isaiah lviii. 8.

and especially with reference to the laws of Moses. Take down any book professing to elucidate Hebrew law, and you will find it occupied with details and arguments and illustrations concerning the sacrifices and the priesthood, or perhaps with solutions of the representational and allegorical character of certain political institutions ; but the moral and political obligations devolving on wealth, and especially on the state, to look after and to aid poverty,—why, you scarcely find a volume in which this is referred to at all.

The Bible does not regard poverty or even indigence as wicked ; it never teaches that “the poor as a lump are bad.” Mosaic institutions probably prevented the rise and institution of the order of beggars ; indeed, beggars can only exist where the state has relinquished its duties and responsibilities. There is even no word for beggar or for beggary in the Hebrew language. Sound legislation would make the occupation or profession of the beggar or the tramp impossible, but that can only be, not merely by repression, but by providing that the indigent shall not therefore starve.

And should not the poor be cared for ? We need not believe in democracies and pantisocracies, we need not desire to see political power lodged in the hands of ignorance and mere poverty ; those are not the best friends of the poor who desire this : pet communistic theories, in which the Judas and Barabbas may go for as much or for more than for Jesus in the

vote-market, will find no friend or advocate in the laws of Moses or of God : but on the other hand, it surely is the duty of the state to look up, and to look after every member of the state, not merely when they have become criminal, but to prevent them falling into crime ; no person ought to be permitted to starve in a great wealthy country like ours, while those also who will not work should not be permitted to turn themselves adrift to eat the bread of idleness and charity ; a rigorous and rhadamanthine system of law should compel them to the industry they seek to evade. By what law of common sense can the innumerable thousands of our black criminals be permitted to lie in ambush, to glut themselves on the wages of crime ? On the other hand, by what law of holy human charity can the deserving poor, the children of dark providences, be left to perish in forgetfulness, or to find in the workhouse a lesser allowance of food and far inferior and scantier comforts than would be theirs were they criminals convicted of some heinous crime, and lodged in the luxurious chambers of a jail ? It was not so that the Divine law spoke through Moses. First of all I notice that the maintenance of the poor was thrown on the land. There was a tithe for the priest, and a tithe for the maintenance of the sacrifices of the altar, and a tithe for the poor,—a liberal and ungrudging handful for the poor :—

“ At the end of three years thou shalt bring forth all the tithe of thine increase the same year, and shalt

lay it up within thy gates : and the Levite (because he hath no part nor inheritance with thee), and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within thy gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied ; that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest.”* Again, “If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother : but thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth. Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand ; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought. . . . Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him. . . . For the poor shall never cease out of the land : therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land.†

And the pattern for the maintenance of the poor of a state is given in the law of Moses, and that pattern was for some time the law in this land. Poor rates with us are a modern invention, and they came out of the amazing spoliation of land which took place at the time of our Reformation. We ought

* Deut. xiv. 28, 29.

† Deut. xv. 7-11.

never, in our country, to have or know a poor rate in any sense of it; and at this moment I believe there would be found comparatively few persons desirous of the disestablishment of the Church of England, were it not felt that the church properties are so iniquitously appropriated. The Political Church, in the disestablishment which, it is to be feared, is imminent, is suffering the consequences of her own injustice. Land is like no other property, and it ought to be felt that the nation, as a nation, has claims upon it for the support of all that constitutes the true well-being, the prosperity, and peace of the nation; and the only justice there can be in disestablishment will be in the restoration back again to the interests of poverty or of education,—to those unable otherwise to obtain that blessing,—of those immense revenues which have now for ages been stolen from the poor and devoted to the purposes of private luxury. Nor do I think we should too rashly give ourselves to the question of the disendowment of the Establishment, unless we have before us some plan for dealing with church property which shall give to the interests of poverty that which upon every principle of justice it may claim.

There were other and more occasional provisions for the poor. Thus in Leviticus: "And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not make clean riddance of the corners of thy field when thou reapest, neither shalt thou gather any gleaning of thy har-

vest : thou shalt leave them unto the poor, and to the stranger : I am the Lord your God."* Again in Deuteronomy : "When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it : it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow : that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands. When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again : it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward : it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt : therefore I command thee to do this thing."† All this reads very singularly to us who remember a poor man sent to the House of Correction and the tread-mill for a month, for taking a turnip from a field ; and a poor woman, the wife of a respectable labouring man, sent to jail for a week for picking up only two or three ears of corn. Here is, however, the assertion of another principle—namely, the right of the poor to some consideration from the possessions of wealth and competence. It may seem that such gleanings could not be considerable, but this will not be supposed by those who know the rich fertility of the soil of Palestine,—land of the olive and

* Leviticus xxiii. 22.

† Deuteronomy xxiv. 19-22.

the vine and the pomegranate and the honeycomb. Then, also, every field was to have sacredly set apart the corner for the poor—and a large corner too, if we may judge of what that corner was supposed to yield. On every vine there was the poor man's branch, and in every field there was the poor man's corner. Thus were the provisions made, throughout every village, for the widow, and the fatherless, and for "the stranger,"—that is, the poor foreigner,—“the stranger that is within thy gates.”

Let those who boast of what Greece and Rome and India have given to us, produce any instances like these: how different the mere cruel despotism of Babylon and Egypt, which only existed to oppress with the most cruel inflictions and exactions all the poor; so all the great works of Nineveh and Egypt and India rose, but there was no consideration of the poor,—they perished by scores, perhaps hundreds of thousands, in the erection of all those mighty works. But not so the Hebrew poor,—they were the subjects of a Divine polity and the children of a Divine care. Thus the directions in Leviticus xix. 9, substantially repeating what has been quoted above, provide for donations to the poor as the tithe in kind was the provision for the ordinary maintenance.

In every field, in every plot of ground throughout all the villages of the land, was the poor man's corner—the corner of the poor; here was one of the grand items of the poor law of old. We have seen how

every effort is made to defraud the poor. Of old almost every neighbourhood had its common,—that was the corner of the poor: the commons are almost all enclosed; were they enclosed even for the maintenance of the poor we might not complain; but filched to add to the wealth of the wealthy, what is their enclosure but a crime?

It was a Divine means to keep the nature open to gentle influences to have this corner for the poor. Have we learnt the Divine art of distribution? Accumulation goes on; but what do we give to the poor,—where is our corner? Monopoly is on every hand; that golden principle of buying in the cheapest market and selling in the dearest, seems from some aspects to have torn the moral sense out of the nation. Shop girls are paid such wages that it is no marvel that they also fly to the wages of sin to eke out the miserable wages of labour; and childhood and infancy are employed to carry forward the gains of giant all-successful competition; and, in spite of what machinery does, I look with a shudder upon innumerable articles of cheapness, and I walk away saying to myself, in the language of James, "Behold, the hire of the labourers, which is of you kept back, crieth, and their cries enter into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth." Alas, for the corner of the poor! I do not say we give too much money in church and chapel building; but assuredly, were I a man of wealth, that would not be the direction I should take:

I would rather put up a few almshouses ; I would try to transplant honest and reputable poverty from its companionship of shame and crime. We think all is done when the miserable wages are paid, and when the poor body is kept from drifting into absolute starvation. Such were not the laws of Moses.

Then there were provisions for enjoyment, and recreation, and rest. The Sabbath itself was a part of the poor-law of the Bible : "Thou shalt do no labour therein, thy man-servant, thy maid-servant, cattle and stranger that is within thy gates." Rest ! rest !—it was not supposed that the whole day was to be given to purposes of devotion, but to rest. He who sought to divert the people to labour, sinned against the well-being of society ; and who will say he does not ? Then it was a part of the Hebrew poor-law that there should be occasions for festivity and enjoyment ; the statutes are mentioned in Deuteronomy xii. 5, 12, 17, 19 ; xiv. 22-29 ; xvi. 10, 11 ; xxvi. 12, 13. Common charity thinks only of giving the poor a small hard crust of daily bread ; but this is a noble sort of beneficence, it is the beneficence of sentiment. It was, no doubt, to this that Christ referred (Mark xiv. 12-14) in the guest-chamber. But it was in the true spirit of this He said, "When thou makest a feast call not thy rich neighbours, but call together the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind : for these cannot recompense thee, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven."

The polity of Moses did not disdain regard to rest and recreation for the people. The Feast of Trumpets was followed by the Feast of Tabernacles. Modern civilization will regard it as mere sentiment—the foolish ovation of a pastoral people: in fact, it was a grand national celebration; it was the memorial of the time when their ancestors were dwellers in tents—in tabernacles, as Isaac and Jacob; it was also the autumn and the harvest feast; it was the Israelites' Harvest Home. The Temple, the roofs of the houses, all the cities were covered with sudden verdure; busy hands twined palm and fir, myrtle and pomegranate; and through the suburbs of cities and villages rose festoons, and tents and tabernacles in which the citron and the apple of Paradise glowed amidst the dark green of the bowers; and as the evening star appeared in heaven, every family left the dwelling to occupy its tabernacle; amidst the gentle wind which stirred the leaves went on the sounds of festivity and songs, and hymns arose to the melody of cymbal and of psaltery; altogether it was a grand national hymn. It was instituted in memory of that Providence which had preserved their tribes through the wild weather of the wilderness from the beasts and the enemies; which had hovered over them in cloud and fire; and brought them out into a good place.

But it yet remains that I notice that famous enactment of Moses against the possibility of the too dangerous accumulation of property—the Year of Jubilee.

We have appropriated the spiritual sense, but we have forgotten the political ; we have come to the times spoken of by the Prophet Isaiah (v. 5) : “Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, *till there be no place that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth.*” This is the very curse of our country. Why, it is a very difficult matter indeed to obtain a farm ; where one hundred years since there were three hundred farms, there are only one hundred now ; some Ahab is always looking over his park walls and longing for Naboth’s vineyard. Huge estates, huge farms swallow up all the small holdings, even as huge businesses swallow up all the smaller stores. Now in the economy of the poor-laws of the Hebrews, that which will be effected by the abolition of the law of primogeniture was effected by its continuance. Slavery was the usage all over the earth, especially in those great oriental nations. Men sold themselves, but the poor-law taught them there was something they could not part with,—they retained a birthright still : all arrangements were suspended on the Year of Jubilee, “the captive exile hastened to be released.” We can scarcely understand how society could be underpropped by such an institution. That year the very land had rest ; wonderful, we should say, would be the sagacity of these laws, did we not know them to be of Divine origin ; the increased growth and fertility of the land was secured by its season of repose. Oh, sweet to many a heart, to many a home,

must often have been the sound of those silver trumpets proclaiming the advent of the year! Now we shall get back the old family farm, now we shall go to old homestead again, now again we shall see the old fields, and enjoy the old patrimony! exulting hearts rejoiced in the dawn of the Jubilee morning. Slaves no longer, bondsmen no longer, once more free and for home. It was thought indeed that the mild service of the Hebrew household would bind some to the spot and to the household; then indeed the servant was taken to the door-post, and the ear was pierced in token of his relinquishment of his claim. To this David alludes: "Mine ears hast Thou opened," *i.e.* pierced, bound me to Thyself. But thus you see the polity of Moses looked constantly towards the poor to save from plucking down the state, to enable them on the contrary to bear up the burdens of the state; not to be a curse, but a blessing to it. It has been said indeed that many portions of the political laws of Moses were little more than a sublime dream, never in fact realized; that, like the "Republic" of Plato, or the "Utopia" of Sir Thomas More, or the "Oceana" of Harrington, these ideas of the great legislator were never filled out in the real lives of men and women. Especially the Sabbatical Year has been pronounced so impossible and even absurd that we never have insinuated at all in any portion of the Scriptures its observance as a fact; but Michælis has, with his usual judgment, reproved the levity of Bishop Warburton,

and shown how, whether observed or not, there was sufficient show of reason for this great institution of Moses ; that it is exceedingly probable that the excellent sufficiency of the harvest provision, which was to justify the repose of the land during the Sabbath year, was to be tested not by the sixth year alone but the six years ; that the enactment was especially intended to lead to the accumulation of corn, while it was also intended to operate as a prohibition against its sale to the Sidonians and other great Phœnician merchants : it was one of those laws intended to repress intercourse with the surrounding peoples, whose idolatries were assuredly dangerous to the purity of the Israelitish faith, as their barbaric civilization would be assuredly dangerous to the noble simplicity of Israelitish manners.

We will not expect certainly a golden age in an iron world ; and while we even here attempt as best in us lies to honour all men, and to smooth in some measure the asperities of life, we need with the Bible to honour the poor. I know some are very crafty, some are very wicked : alas ! these attributes also I fancy may be found with the rich ; the poor have no monopoly of crafty ways and hard hearts ; but you must learn true charity and mutual help, I believe, from the homes of the poor. Even as in one of his finest poems, "The old Cumberland Beggar," Wordsworth has said,—

“But of the poor man ask, the abject poor,—
Go, and demand of him, if there be here,
In this cold abstinence from evil deeds,
And these inevitable charities,
Wherewith to satisfy the human soul?
No! man is dear to man; the poorest poor
Long for some moments in a weary life
When they can know and feel that they have been
Themselves the fathers and the dealers-out
Of some small blessings—have been kind to such
As needed kindness—for this single cause
That we have all of us one human heart.”

XV.

*The Villages of the Great Plain of Jezreel, or
Esdraelon.*

“And they shall hear Jezreel.”—HOSEA ii. 22.

THE great plain or valley of Jezreel is a poem in itself. Alike in its scenic and historic associations, it is one of the most sublime spots in the Holy Land. Traveller through England, and reverent visitant of its haunts and its shrines, do you know Dartmoor? Perhaps, then, you may form some idea of the great plain; only it was the very highway of Israel, from opposite sides, into Egypt and Assyria. A sort of vast, extended Blackheath, stretching out in an irregular triangle to a length of eighteen miles, and a breadth of twelve. A truly sublime spot,—the very platform of Israelitish history; once, no doubt, studded with villages, now, although so rich a spot, mostly deserted, and given up entirely to the wandering Bedowins, those “corsairs of the wilderness and the desert.”* A most singular plain. Look at it on

* Stanley.

the map. There, at one extreme, it terminates in Mount Carmel, looking towards, and indeed overhanging, the sea ; at its foot rushes along the Kishon from the centre of the plain, emptying itself into the Mediterranean here at Cape Carmel. Opposite to Carmel, at the other extreme end of the plain, soar the heights of Gilboa. In the centre of the plain stood the royal seat of Ahab and Jezebel—Jezreel. This plain was the inheritance of Issachar : look at it again on the map, and you will understand why the seer announced his heraldic sign as “a strong ass couching down between two burdens. There are Manasseh on one side, and Zebulon on the other.” “But he saw that rest was good, and the land that it was pleasant, and he bowed his shoulders to bear, and became a servant to tribute.” One of the richest spots in Palestine, the plain has always been one of the most insecure. Many writers have drawn out the leading features of this singular spot,—most instructively and delightfully Dean Stanley ; while Miss Martineau has sketched, as with a graphic crayon, in rapid dark outline the march of events over the great plain. But if we step over it, it will not be to call up its famous historical pictures, but to loiter in two or three of its villages. Among them we perhaps might find many a charming village idyl. It alone might furnish a series of grand suggestive paintings, either for word or for pencil. A group of scenes selected from this spot would present some of the

most striking and central incidents in Israel's history; but in the villages, some of the most tender. And you notice, too, how often the soft and gentle is found in the neighbourhood of the most tragic and stern. It seems as if appointed to be the very battle-ground of opinions; here Zebah and Zalmunnah mustered their forces,—those splendid oriental princes; from one of these heights Deborah poured out her fierce and splendid rush of song over Sisera; it was there, on Carmel, the fire descended; and here below Kishon,—“that ancient river Kishon,”—swept away the prophets of the groves at the command of Elijah. Famed as Israel's most eventful battle-field, it is even said that in this valley and in these mountains shall be heard the notes of the Lord's last controversy with men. This is the place of that Armageddon—the place of Megiddo—in which John, in the visions of the Apocalypse, beheld the musterings of the armies for the last great war. The world has scarcely a more tragic and suggestive spot.

I wish I could present before you a good picture of the plain of Jezreel, or, as you generally see it called, because the Greek has softened the Hebrew, Esdraelon. It is a vast, broken heath, or plain, or moor. This, the great battle-ground of the Bible, is bounded by magnificent mountains on every side, as we have already said. Here, on the right, by Gilboa; there, by Tabor; on the left, by the hills of Manasseh; yonder, by Carmel; through the centre rolls the

river Kishon, of which Deborah sang ; down here is the valley of the Jordan ; the plain stretching between it is a wonderful ground. In imagination we might summon the dead to rise to tell us almost all the story of the Hebrew nation. Here were fought the great battles of Jezreel and Bethabara, as Gideon here led on his hosts ; and here, at the tent door, stood the lone watching woman, as the spent general Sisera came hurrying by ; there "she brought him butter in a lordly dish." All the great actors pass across this plain. Elijah the Tishbite often passed over it. On the plain Gehazi followed Naaman, to obtain his gift by fraud ; and here came the young prophet Jonah, and anointed Jehu. Then a tramp of armies flows over the battle-field, a throng of ghosts of prophets and kings, warriors and victims. Smooth, and yet more or less uneven, as what such plain is not ? A rural spot ; its ridges were occupied by little villages, rude excavations from the rock ; its more level parts by such villages as we associate with the well-to-do farm. I have just now likened the plain of Jezreel to Dartmoor ; or shall I say to these downs which lift themselves so sweetly and serenely over us in Sussex ?

But there is at present no more weird village in the neighbourhood of the whole plain than Endor. It was always a wild, secluded spot, among the ridges opposite Mount Tabor. Yonder, the Philistines had made their last determined effort, breaking in upon

this plain when driven from the fastnesses of Judah. The king and his sons and his generals were there ; but as from its commanding heights Saul gazed upon the Philistine armies, his heart trembled exceedingly. On the same place Gideon had looked upon such armies, and had named the place Harod, the place of trembling. Night fell ; what of to-morrow ? It was a moment of dreadful agony. Where is God ? He does not answer by Urim or Thummin or by any vision. Where is Samuel ? Gone ! Where is David, his harp and his sword ? Gone ! Who shall draw back the curtain and give comfort ?—if not a prophet or a seer, is there none, no other voice ? None ; they are all proscribed or put to death by the king. Does Abner, wise Abner, know of none ? Did I not hear that that mother of thine had escaped,* and still holds her communion of enchantments in a cave ? To find her is easy. And so forth they went on their night journey, muffled and disguised. Singular, to leave God and fly to a crone, an old woman ! They had to travel about eight or nine miles. Their direct way had been through Shunem, a little village where, years after, Elisha stayed with the great lady of the place. Now there was fear, and the Philistines spread along the valley. Endor is immediately behind some gloomy grotto in the dark riven sides of the hill. We are in the abode of the witch. It is an extraordinary,

* Tradition says the Witch of Endor was the mother of Abner.

it is a tingling story. It is even one of the most dramatic stories of the book. Saul was prostrate in despair. A man—especially such a man—must fly somewhere in despair. He yearned towards the supernatural; he was compelled by a principle of his being to believe in it. There is in man an instinct, even a passion, for the supernatural. It exercises a spell over men. How it overarches our sense of things! Men laugh at it, reason it away, and then shiver at shadows. So with Saul. He cast off all allegiance to God, but he could not cast off himself. He, no more than we moderns, could fly from his shadow. So the king walks with a soul all dreadfully alive through the long journey of the night, through the silence of the wilderness. What could he do? He had slain all the priests, exiled his friend, so he flies to the cave in the wild village. The spirits he had raised abandoned him. What could he do? Call up Samuel! How like to many, who like Saul, have cast off all fear and restraint before God, who have said, Who is God, that I should pray to Him? and who find themselves only left shivering before the spectres which will not retire! Call up Samuel! Come back again, dearest friend,—father, mother, wife. How many, like Saul, are only left to their despair! Did Samuel come? I believe so; I cannot but wonder that any should doubt that he came—not that this is essential to the lesson of the story. The lesson is, that men may be infidels too long,

and believers too late. A spirit more or less is of little matter to the Bible, where the supernatural and spirits of many orders familiarly come and go. Oh yes, it was Samuel,—the spectre disturbed in sleep in Hades by the passionate entreaties of earth. But the point is, that spiritual law and lessons may be so abused that they only become the vehicles of despair. It seems as if hope is gone, what we have despised is lost; more quickly stirs the longing for the old friend, for the voices of the old revelation; but it was only seeking to the voices of Nature. Then what a journey back—over the fountain of the Dor, stealthily past the warrior hosts beneath the stars, the sob of the winds over the plains, over the light grass, down the deep fissures of the rocks. What conversations and what fears, all things wailing, “The Lord hath rent the kingdom out of thine hand, the Lord is departed from thee;” it is the sunset of a soul, it is the end of nature: nature can yearn, and inquire, and fear, and despair, and exclaim, “Answer me, answer me, answer me!” and the drear and wild and desolate crags and caves of Endor are worthy of such despair. The story of the cave of Endor is of the sunset of a soul.

I said, between the battle-plain of Gilboa and Mount Hermon, at whose foot lay the village of Endor, lay Shunem,—some such village as the romantic Widdicombe-in-the-Moor, in the centre of Dartmoor. It was a village in which there happened a wonderful

and beautiful episode in the prophet Elisha's history. A child is given in answer to prayer ; and raised from the dead in answer to a prophet's power in prayer.

We have remarked that the plain is the place of many singular Hebrew idyls; it was probably studded with villages and scattered farmsteads. Here, amidst rich cornfields, and about three miles from the fountain of Jezreel, stood the village of Shunem at the foot and on the slopes of the little Hermon ; it is still apparently one of the cultivated portions of the great plain ; it is a flourishing village, and hedges and pleasant gardens encompass it, although there are no traces of its singular antiquity. Here dwelt the great lady, the friend of Elisha, who built the little chamber in the wall for the wayfaring prophet—there are the fields in that far-off day alive with the reapers—and here the little son of the great woman was smitten with the sun-stroke, followed by almost instant death. It is one of the most pathetic stories of the Bible—one of the few instances in which a prophet wrestled with death and overcame. We know how often a single incident make a place remarkable and memorable. There are innumerable spots in English scenery which have a place in English history, but they would awaken no thought, only some circumstance has given to them a consecration and a charm ; such is Runnymede, near Windsor. The very name makes an Englishman's ears to tingle, but it is only by one memory ; or may I say such is Brading, in the

Isle of Wight, where the lovely little churchyard was once sought by thousands of feet, because it held the grave of the young cottager. Humanity consecrates place. Life it is which relieves or redeems the dreariness of the wilderness, and sheds over the desert a pensive but a powerful charm in the landscape. The rich and sweet waters of the lake, or the tall aspiring mountain, or the grand and sombre majesties of the wood, become almost intolerable if we do not see some life there beside their own; but the solitary bird passing over the lake, or the traveller on the banks of it, a woodman in the forest, or a hut among the mountains,—how they relieve and seem even to glorify the picture! Artists know this; it is the consecrating charm of humanity or of life. So it is with place. We should never have heard of or thought of most of these villages of the Bible, but for some touching human incident which has made them so pathetic, and has given to them almost the heritage of immortality. Who would ever have heard of Nain, but for the widow and her son?—or of Shunem, but for the mother and her little child? Yet many widows since then, and before, have lost an only son; but thus it is, through a common human circumstance, in a little ordinary every-day village of Palestine, pictures are presented, hopes breathing heavenly life into the soul of man.*

* Dr. Tristram's experience at Nain is very pertinent to the story :—
"To the east of Nain, by the road-side, about ten minutes' walk from

It was probably evening, and it also seems probable that our Lord had walked thirty miles that day. It appears that He had walked from Capernaum to Nain ; but if He could not be too late He would not be too early. And He, who always discriminated time and place and person, knew, as He left Capernaum the night before, the work He had set for Himself on the morrow—to-day. Did He not know, as He paced along the rugged road, a widow's heart remained to be comforted? The village of the great

the village, lies the ancient burying-ground, still used by the Moslems ; and probably on this very path our Lord met that sorrowing procession. A few oblong piles of stones, and one or two small-built graves with whitened plaster, are all that mark the unfenced spot. An old Mussulman rose up from his prayers to point out to us what he said were the ruins of the widow's house—a mere heap of the stones like the rest. It struck us as curious that a Mahomedan should thus unasked have a locality to point out for a Christian miracle ; it can scarcely have arisen from the number of inquiries after it, since Nain lies somewhat out of the beaten track ; and though all the great events of the Old Testament are handed down among the Moslems in a more or less distorted form, their traditions very rarely extend to the New Testament. This and the site of the house of Simon the tanner at Jaffa, are among the few which occurred to us. There is a painful sense of desolation about Nain. All around is bare and forbidding, as though it had known not the time of its visitation, and therefore the houses had been left to it desolate. To the west of the village, just outside the traces of the wall, is an ancient well or fountain—fountains never change, and the existence of this one is doubtless the cause of the place remaining partially inhabited. A young Arab girl had just been filling her pitcher, and we asked her for a drink. She set down her tall water-jar and readily gave it. On our offering her a small present she declined it ; tears filled her eyes, and she said she did not give it for money, she would take no backshish, but she gave it to the strangers for the memory of her mother who was lately dead, for charity, and for the love of God. In vain we pressed it—who could not but feel a touch of sympathy? The poor single-hearted girl kissed our hands, and we walked on."

plain was two miles to the south of Tabor, near to the source of the Kishon. Was there any prophetic anticipation of this moment when it was said, "Tabor and Hermon shall rejoice in Thy name"? Here is the perpetually-renewed story—the life of Nature, the fair scenery of Nature, the decay of man, and the presence of the power of the Lord of life. How affecting the pensive uniformity of Nature! While you bear the dead to their rest the cloud moves, and the river sings, and the mountain hangs lofty and communing with the winds; the sun looks unpitifully down, while man is borne to his rest. Only as Faith sees the Saviour standing by the bier does Nature become the evanescent and man become the immortal.

So in leaving Endor let us go on along the ridge of hills to where they bend round, about fifty minutes' ride from Shunem, about two miles and a half from Endor. Here is Nain, which signifies "pleasant"; and truly pleasant is the story which greets us there, for here too was fulfilled that prophecy, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings"—how beautiful the voice which with authority can say, Weep not! It is a poor village now, of about twenty low huts or houses; caves lie along the hill-side, there are the old cemeteries; and coming along the road from the little upland hamlet of the plain,—a hamlet more considerable then than now,—see a funeral procession to this very cemetery.

It is not possible to misunderstand the pathos of that story—"the only son of his mother, and she was a widow"; he was her all in all, then—the all of her heart and of her house. The two processions met—Life and Death. The bier was, as usual then, open, only the thin cloth kept the glare of the sun from the child's brow. As the procession passed from the gate it met two or three friends about to enter the village. We know the foremost; He had travelled far on foot from Capernaum; weary He was: lip and foot and forehead had showed them that; but He saw the grief-stricken mother. "Stop!" He said, and they who bore the bier rested; then He drew the pall from the mother's grasp, and raised it from the face, and said, "Young man, *I* say unto thee, arise!" "And he that was dead sat up," and the Lord of life gave him back to his mother. How different from Endor! There despair deepened, in Nain hope brightened; the first declares the wounding of nature, the other the healing of the Saviour. How often hearts have said, "Lord, hadst Thou been here, my child had not died." Well, this village of Nain is to preach to us the gospel of the resurrection; and when death with its awful burden enters the house and stretches out the bier, let us remember He can and will raise, He can and will restore; and souls that lie like Saul at the cave of despair, as in an Endor of unmixed desolation, the tainted atmosphere stripping every trace of foliage from the scene, barrenness and blackness in

impassable mountains and unreplying stars, only the arid desert of the soul—there is hope if “Jesus of Nazareth passeth by”; there is hope, for He said, “*I say unto thee, arise,*” even as He said, “*I am the resurrection and the life.*” Surely Jesus never speaks, and speaks in vain. But this I know: when He has once spoken to the dead, there is no doubt more, there is no despair more. If Endor tells us the story of despair in the sunset, Nain tells us the story of hope in the sunrise, of the soul.

And in which of the villages was it that the woman who was a sinner was met by Jesus with the words, “*I say unto thee, Her sins which are many are forgiven, for she loved much*”? It is by no means certain where the events mentioned by Luke took place, only, that by the contextual passages in that gospel, they seem to have happened in Nain, or in one of the near villages of Esdraelon or Jezreel. The character of this most pathetic scene must have often repeated itself in the journeys of our Lord through those villages. Who was this woman? It all happened somewhere in our Lord’s progress. To us the circumstances are full of significance. It might have been in Nain: it is arbitrary to fix it anywhere, or to attach it to any character; only I think it was in Nain. It is the story of a wounded heart, and how it had been lost through its own love, and how it was found, and how it was dealt with by infinite love. “*She loved much.*” It seems to be implied that she

was one in whom some misplaced love had turned to ill. She was not poor. What was the nature of the sin which had branded her? We do not know; evil is many-coloured, and there were many things, which, in that intense ceremonialism, when the heart was eaten out of religion, and the fleshless skeleton was covered over with gorgeous or respectable robes, were even like mortal sins. She had herself loved, thrown her whole vehement, passionate nature into her affections. Then all had broken down; she had been deceived. What an epoch it is in the history of a soul, when love learns to despise what it had loved! The soul is never lost until then; it cannot be quite swallowed up of bitterness until then. No one is quite lost so long as some purifying and over-mastering passion rules the life. Well, she lost all this, and then all was lost. The fine, noble, self-renouncing nature abandoned itself—I do not think we need believe to lowest sin; *ἀμαρτωλος* had a very wide signification among the Jews. Enough to know, the finger of scorn was pointed at her. She was a lost soul; and she surrendered herself; and all the devils came, and spread their banquet, and sat down within the chamber swept and garnished by her for them. There was the silent devil, brooding; and there was the vehement devil, and the unbelieving devil, and the devil of revenge, and the devil of contempt. So she moved to and fro, not through avenues of mere impurity, but her whole life was one impure idea, in

which hate was lord of all. Such was this Mary, this bitter one ; so she went to and fro, with a heart like a stone, on fire. All people knew her ; and when she heard of the preaching of the young man Jesus, all the prejudices of her religion,—for she was religious ; such people can be religious,—armed her against Him. She heard of His sermons, and mocked them ; she heard of His miracles, and even despised Him for doing so much for a race she hated ; and at last she saw Him, heard Him, He too was treated with contempt ; and yet His life was so free from every stain, He was so suffering in His look, so wasted, and so worn and weary. She knew He was footsore ; by the instincts of love, she knew there was a sadness in His soul too. Then His eye fell upon her like light, and His words fell like medicine,—like medicinal waters on her heart ; and it seemed as if something snapped within her that had bound her ; “her flesh came again as the flesh of a little child.” Then He wove His words round her, and the darkness rolled from her brain, and the madness from her heart, and thoughts resumed their old healthful array, and love lifted her and caught up all that had gone before, and melted it in the flames of a new, pure, holy love. Before, she knew herself wronged ; now, she forgot that, and knew herself sinning. The love of Christ had found her out and melted her ; and she, guided by Christ, had found Him, and love had sublimed her. Conscience was now at peace. She who had

scorned society when it had put its ban upon her as one never to be forgiven, judged no attitude too lowly in which she might sue for pardon. Once more Jesus came that way ; He had walked far, scattering miracles and words and loving glances ; and Simon, respectable Simon, invited Him—Simon, who had injured Mary, to whom perhaps she was related, whom she knew so costly in appearance, so scant in courtesy. She saw those feet as the Saviour moved painfully along. She saw the majestic face unrefreshed. She came behind with the bowl of water, her hair unbound,—the sign, the well-known sign, of contrition,—the long hair, as she knelt, swept the ground ; she would not touch those feet with the towel : and she knew Him ; He did not gather Himself away ; but when all was done, she, inattentive to all save to the heaven of His words, heard the blessing, “Go in peace, go thy way ; Peace.” Pardon and peace ! True to herself, true to the attributes of her nature, she loved in passion,—so she loved also in folly, in sin,—but she had a soul, therefore she could love ; and now her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. It is the story of a heart redeemed by Christ, of a heart by Him “brought up out of the horrible pit and out of the miry clay.” So she tested her love, and had it crowned.

How precious is the love which has stood great tests—temptation, danger, life, death ; love which has done great things, love which has proved itself ! How

it refreshes, how it reposes ! To some lives it is given so to love. How enviable love which has been true love, which has stood the test of separation and of time—love like God's love ; for the son, for the wife, for the husband ! Oh, for pure, holy love, there is never wanting the alabaster box of precious ointment. See love in the old pair who have struggled and wept and been disappointed together—love which has stood great tests. Yet I do not commend the largest sacrifices of love so much as the smallest act of duty,—the approval of duty is so unsmiling and severe. What we call love is often only pleasing ourselves ; and the commendations of love are so sustaining and so sweet. The rarity of the world is “to love much” ; and yet there is nothing great but love, and nothing eternal or immortal but love. It is all things in one word, and that word is only—Love. The great test of love is, that love is known by what it does, what it endures, what it suffers, what it forgives. But I would not entertain you with a creature's wrongs or a creature's love, but rise from thence to the love of Christ. He passes unhurt through the five great tests of love ; and it is not what ours is to Him, but what His is to us. A beautiful novelist tells of his heroine, how she wore what she in her ignorance supposed to be a chain of glass beads, but they turned out to be diamonds and brilliants of matchless lustre and beauty. How glad was she, not to keep, but to give them where she loved ! Even so, we have love like a chain of diamonds, un-

known to us ; but when we know its true worth and value we give it back to Him who gave. The great test of love is, what it has done. It has borne me, it has borne with me—borne me on and borne me up. What has it done? “Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed, that we should be called His children!” Hence it is so that love awakens conscience. How love has sometimes loved and suffered and brooded, and there has been no return! I wonder that some hearts are not chilled into stone. Some hearts freeze you. I do not wonder at the diminishing number of loving women. The wrongs of womankind are infinite, and Women’s Rights Associations will not heal or help, nor education much improve. But it seems as if the last test of love is when it is sweet to be pardoned. Of these two hard things, no doubt it is harder to yield to forgiveness than to forgive. Both are hard, but none ever forgive until they know for themselves the sweetness of the forgiven sin. It is one of the tests of love as given by John: “I write unto you because your sins are forgiven you.” I say, how we must love before we can say it is sweet to be pardoned! We dare not breathe the word forgiven where love is not ; then God knows nothing of pardon ; He cannot and will not forgive, except when you hold your cup for that wine. Love holds up the cup, and love pours into it of the wine of forgiveness, and says, “Go in peace.” In peace! Wonderful mystery! The glad-

ness over the forgiven sin. Then all is healed, and all is still in the inward music from the inflowing of eternal light and joy. Such thoughts and holy idyls meet us as we walk in the neighbourhood of Nain and the villages of the great moorland of Jezreel.

XVI.

Engedi, the Village of the Outlaws.

“And it came to pass, when Saul was returned from following the Philistines, that it was told him, saying, Behold, David is in the wilderness of En-gedi. Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and went to seek David and his men upon the rocks of the wild goats.”—I SAM. xxiv. 1, 2.

“As a cluster of camphire in the vineyards of En-gedi.”—SONG OF SOLOMON i. 14.

YOU know there was a period in David's life when he was, not indeed an exile, but an outlaw. He had to fly for his life to the wilderness. He said, “I shall one day perish by the hand of this Saul.” He fled to the wildernesses which stretch away, skirted on one side by the Dead Sea, and fronted on the other by tall mountains. We have many interesting adventures there. In those neighbourhoods were the caves of Adullam; there was the wilderness of Maon and the wilderness of Ziph. But among the most inaccessible of those abodes was En-gedi (Ain-jedi)—that is, The Fountain of the Wild Goat; rather, as we should say, of the ibex, the Syrian chamois, or the ~~antelope~~ ^{ibex}. Travellers in Switzerland have not to be told how,

travelling high up, you come upon crags—the fastnesses and very castellated turrets of nature, while the rich plains spread themselves out, affording the place for pasture, for the village, for the field, and the food. David discovered this seclusion, not unknown before—a spot of natural fertility, for it is called in the Chronicles, Hazon-tamar, the Place of the Palm-tree Cuttings. Not a palm-tree now exists there. It is to be supposed, when the earliest possessors came there, they found the rich palm forests; and there, and from them, they reared their villages, and called the place by the beautiful name. Amidst those wild but beautiful solitudes, a compelled outlaw, David, with his young men, established himself; but he reduced his band to order. He was no mere wild, lawless outlaw. What a testimony is that borne by the servants of Abigail to his behaviour in the wilderness of Maon close by! “The men were very good to us, and we were not hurt, neither missed we anything as long as we were conversant with them when we were in the fields. They were a wall unto us by night and by day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep.”

Amidst these high hills, “a refuge for the wild goat,” the young outlawed poet and warrior found a shelter, a refuge, and a home. It is of this place Dr. Robinson says, “As we came in view of the ravine, a mountain goat started up, and bounded along the face of the rocks on the opposite side. Indeed, we

were now in 'the wilderness of En-gedi,' where David and his men lived among 'the rocks of the wild goats,' and where the former cut off the skirts of Saul's robe in a cave. The whole scene is drawn to the life. On all sides the country is full of caverns, which might then serve as lurking-places for David and his men, as they do for outlaws at the present day."* That wild seclusion which fitted this place to be the retreat of the outlawed David, still gives to it its dangerous character; and Tristram, and Lynch, and other travellers, had experiences to confirm the bad reputation of the magnificent mountain solitude.

Engedi itself was on a perpendicular cliff, hanging fifteen hundred feet above the Dead Sea. The palms have all gone, the vineyards all gone; the henna, the beautiful wild flower supposed to be that called the camphire, abounds still. The crags and cliffs are thronged with doves; and upon a shelf of the mountain there is a little lakelet or fountain, breaking forth into a stream, and tumbling on—no great torrent, but a thread of silver—for four hundred feet below; this was the fountain of the hart, the wild goat, the ibex, or the chamois. "It is very interesting," says Dr. Tristram, "to find this graceful creature—*i.e.* the wild goat—by the very fountain to which it gave its name (En-gedi), and in the spot where it roamed of old while David wandered to escape the persecutions of Saul. When clambering on the heights above

* Robinson, "Biblical Researches," vol. ii. p. 203.

En-gedi, I often, by the help of my glass, saw the ibex at a distance." * A wonderful sanatorium too, En-gedi! The fountain which leaps along the rocky channels is warm, but the water is very sweet. "But there is cold water, and salt water baths, and sulphur springs only three miles off, and some of the grandest scenery man ever enjoyed, in an atmosphere where half a lung is sufficient for respiration." †

Here it seems as if there are gathered together, if we may follow the delineations of Chateaubriand, all the grand and glowing impressions of the scenery of Palestine, the surface broken only by deep and dreary glens, hemmed in by precipices so lofty as to exclude the sun. The chalky summits of the rocks, rent as by a convulsion, shoot into a thousand fantastic shapes; their sides are perforated by deep caves, which served as a retreat to the saints and martyrs, the prophets of the Old Testament, and the Christians of the middle ages. Every spot here recalls some of the events of sacred story—extraordinary appearances proclaiming a land teeming with miracles: the burning sun, the towering eagle, the barren fig-tree; all the poetry, all the pictures of Scripture are here. Every name commemorates a mystery; every grotto proclaims the future; every hill re-echoes the accents of a prophet. God Himself has spoken in these regions. Dried-up rivers, riven rocks, half-open sepul-

* Tristram, "Natural History of the Bible."

† Tristram, "The Land of Israel."

chres, attest the prodigy. The desert still appears mute with terror; and you would imagine it had never presumed to interrupt the silence since it had heard the awful voice of the Eternal.

Here it was He was free of the wilderness, the wilderness of Ziph, and the other wildernesses of which mention is made—wild spots, inaccessible retreats, “awful and funereal,” writes one traveller, “deep and dreary valleys, hemmed in on each side by precipices so high that the sun sinks untimely behind them; where, at night or by a partial moonlight, imagination may easily conjure up a thousand fantastic shapes from their white chalky summits, rent asunder as if by a convulsion. The caverns may be said to be innumerable; many of them in situations apparently inaccessible—in the very sides of the precipices, more than a hundred feet above the bed of the torrent; no tree, nor shrub, nor even spring of water, gladdens the desolate scene; the curse of the Dead Sea seems even to have reached here. Some of the distant hills to the right afford a contrast to other parts of the wilderness. We had passed these before on the way to Engedi, and seen several shepherds tending their flocks. Their dress was scanty, and their appearance wild; but their pipes at intervals played a strain not very musical, though it appeared most sweet and welcome in such a solitude.”* Who then can doubt that there, amidst those awful solitudes, the

* “Letters from the East,” by John Carne, 1826.

sweet singer of Israel tuned his wild shepherd's reed ? The scenery of the place gives a very real accent to many of the clear stereoscopic pictures of nature in his holy Psalms. Yes, the minstrel's song, and the wild notes of his rich voice or simple flute were heard in these desolate crags and valleys.

I see little occasion to doubt that here, in Engedi, as I have already said, the harp of the sweet singer attained its inspiration. Here was the Athelney of the Hebrew Alfred ; this was his Worms ; this also was his Rydal ; here—

“ He sang of God, the mighty source
Of all things, the stupendous force
On which all strength depends ;
From whose right arm, beneath whose eyes,
All period, power, and enterprise
Commences, reigns, and ends.

Blest was the tenderness he felt,
When to his graceful harp he knelt,
And did for audience call ;
When Satan with his hand he quelled,
And in serene suspense he held
The frantic throes of Saul.”

Here he was free of the wilderness ; hither, to his retreat by the fountain of the wild goat, came Saul, “the deceitful and the unjust man,” against whom he had called on God “to plead his cause.” Ah, if Saul had found *him* sleeping in one of those caves ! But it was here David gave to all ages following those

lessons in grandeur of soul and magnanimity which all are so ready to forget, while they remember and quote his sins. Lithe himself, as the wild creatures after whom the crags were named, what could the cumbrous and heavy Saul do against a stripling like David? Do you not even see a sportive humour in the very acts by which he showed his superiority over his foe? His satiric taunt, for instance, to Abner: "Art not thou a valiant man, and who is like to thee in Israel? Wherefore hast thou not kept thy lord the king? Thou art worthy to die, because thou hast not kept thy master, the Lord's anointed. See where the king's spear is, and the cruse of water that was at his bolster." We can see him brandishing the one and holding up the other. Altogether, the sublime, the pathetic, the humorous, and the graphic mingle together in these various adventures of David, the outlaw of Engedi.

With this spot, too, no doubt, we are to associate the inditing many of the imprecatory Psalms; for here, hunted as a bird through the wilderness, followed to his secluded haunts—here he said, "I shall one day perish by the hand of this Saul." I shall neither attempt to elucidate and explain nor to apologize for these bursts of wrath. David had not been the man he was: had there not surged through his soul vehement passions—tempests even of wild fire? But those who find the passionate imprecations to be the illustrations of the malignant nature

of the young man, will do well not only to remember that these, which sound or read like imprecations, may be just as truly read as prophecies—assurances that “evil shall slay the wicked,” that “bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days”; but more especially should we remember that he whose character is assailed as so malignant, illustrated his “greatness” by his “gentleness,” amidst the wildernesses of Engedi. It was there, when his enemy, seeking his life, was delivered into his hand, he was able to say to him, “The Lord judge between me and thee; as saith the proverb of the ancients: ‘Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked’; but mine hand shall not be upon thee.” And it was there, or in that immediate neighbourhood, upon the occasion when Abishai tempted him, saying, “God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand this day; now, therefore, let me smite him, I pray thee, with the spear, even to the earth at once, and I will not smite him the second time,” David said to Abishai, “Destroy him not, for who can stretch forth his hand against the Lord’s anointed and be guiltless?” David said, furthermore, “As the Lord liveth, the Lord shall smite him, or his day shall come to die, or he shall descend into battle and perish. The Lord forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand against the Lord’s anointed.” And so it fell out: the words were prophetic, and words and incidents form a very appropriate commentary upon what are called the impre-

catory Psalms. Certainly it seems as if, of all men, David might use that awful petition in the Lord's prayer, and "forgive us our trespasses *as* we forgive them that trespass against us."

Yes, I find it to be very pleasant indeed to think of David among the rocks of Engedi. Very singular and beautiful was the inspiration which fell upon him there. Travellers mention the flocks of doves abounding here; these perpendicular crags serve as a refuge of innumerable congregations of them. "In the cliffs above," says Robinson, "multitudes of pigeons were enjoying their nests undisturbed." Instantly the mind recalls the beautiful imagery which seems to have been suggested amidst this scenery: "Oh, my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs"; and yet more distinctly we realize David here. The region is full of suggestions. There are "the wings," yonder, "of the dove covered with silver," or gleaming beneath the rich light, "her feathers like yellow gold." Especially, perhaps, we may associate the fifty-fifth Psalm with these fountains and crags of the wild kid or goat, and those pathetic words, "And I said, Oh, that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest. Lo, then would I wander far off, and remain in the wilderness; I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest." All things here are of him: here was "the land of Jordan"; yonder the "Hermon"-like peak and the little refuge, "the

Mizar," or the little hill (synonymous with Zoar);* and here "his soul was among lions." With this place we can identify all the allusions of the eighteenth Psalm. Here, outlaw as he was, he felt that his "feet were like hinds' feet;" "upon the high places" hither he had "run through a brook and leaped over a wall." Thus everything here speaks of him—of him and the suggestions still lingering on the spot which came to him. There, then, rolled the Dead Sea, speaking of a "river turned into a wilderness and a fruitful land into barrenness for the wickedness of them that dwell therein." There they still gather the apple of Sodom, the Dead Sea fruit;† but all speak of it as the grandeur of desolation. Indeed, the lovely patches of floral verdure in Engedi seem to be very limited; and as the night gathers over the heads of the travellers amidst those dark mountains—the tents amidst the tamarisks, wild canes, and large weeds choking the watercourses—nothing can shut out,—no magnificent sunset, no glorious light of planets and stars, no serene air, no pensive moonlight,—the sense of a profound and awful solitude; while the sound of the torrent tumbling on its way reminds one of him who, as he heard, thought, that "deep called unto deep."

But here was the centre of David's seclusion, here

* See Dr. Tristram's reflections on this spot, in "The Land of Israel," pp. 301, 302.

† Finn, "Bye-ways of Palestine," p. 335; Lynch's "Expedition to the Dead Sea."

the mountains rose between him and his enemies ; up high amidst these munitions of rocks he cultivated the wilderness, and penned his holy hymns. Dr. Tristram spent a sweet Sabbath-day there, and it seemed to him the plain was full of David. Here were breathed into his imagination and fancy the Divine analogies of wild and romantic nature ; it seems beyond a question that here was the place in which he wrote the forty-second Psalm : "As the hart [the wild goat] panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God !" He thought this as he saw the lovely creature coming bounding over the rocks to the springs among the hills. As we have already hinted, no doubt the eighteenth Psalm refers to his life here, although written probably when a king. And still, as we have read, Robinson and Tristram and Ritter have said this place is full of David. And there, too, probably, that Psalm so full of Messianic meaning and splendour, the twenty-second, so mystically entitled, "the Hind of the Morning."

Now I think it greatly to the honour of this Book of our holy faith, that we can look with great pleasure and satisfaction to our faith, on David the outlaw. He was not a mere wild bandit ; among the hills "the law of his God was in his heart," not wreaking on society his revenge, not even in hostility against the king who had so cruelly wronged him, but flying to the spot where, if he could most securely be

screened from invasion, he also would be farthest removed from the possibility of inflicting injury ; and there waiting, abiding the moving of the Divine finger, panting indeed for the joys of holy society, nursing his great soul amidst the solitudes of those eternal hills. A hard matter, no doubt, often to rein in those wild impulsive Syrian young men. As when he wrote, "My soul hath long dwelt among them that hate peace. Woe is me, that I dwell in Mesech and sojourn in the tents of Kedar. I am for peace ; but when I speak they are for war." And then rose the cry from that other Psalm, the fountain of the hart, "Oh, send out Thy truth ; let them lead me and bring me back again to Thy holy hill and to Thy tabernacle !"

These animating words are all to show us the holy outlaw, a brave man maintaining his soul and his soul's best relations in circumstances of amazing difficulty. Here was an outlaw of Providence and of God. Search all history through, and all poetry ; take it in Schiller's conception of his Robbers, or in the magnificent Rienzi ; and you shall not find another so loyal and consecrated an outlaw as David.

I believe we miss the import of many of the most noble promises and finest outgushings of inspiration, because we have learnt to love life so servilely—life seems to us a thing more to be prized than death. How, then, can men die nobly or even willingly ? It is faith in truth, or in a truth, faith in an idea, which

arms men with this sublime contempt of death. There, yonder, is "the secret place of the Most High," and there is the "length of days, even life for evermore." But if death can harm us, can even extinguish us, who, then, would willingly die? The mind of David, like the mind of the East in general, from whence has come all that is most sacred in our conception of the life beyond, was rapt in the Divine repose of those "paths of life," of that "fulness of joy," of those "pleasures for evermore." These, not ascertained as fine surmises, but realized as mighty motive forces—these make heroes and martyrs of men; and where these are not, life languishes, true magnanimity becomes ere long impossible, life becomes nervous and cowardly and cautious, the comforts of to-day shine out glowing and charming by the side of the pale and spectral possibilities of the cold to-morrow of immortality. David among the rocks of Engedi, like Moses in Egypt or in Horeb, "endured as seeing Him who is invisible."

And so Engedi has become typical. Very often, for truth and conscience and freedom and virtue, the noblest souls have been compelled to fly to the wilderness, breathing freely in defiance of an unholy and inequitable law. What stories might be recited of the valleys of Piedmont, of some of the far seclusions of Scotland in the days of the Covenanters, villages in Bohemia, even villages in England; when men met in forests and in glens, waiting and hoping for better

days ; when tyrants had to be resisted and the cause of the right to be maintained ; when Luther was caught into the old forest castle ; when Ulrich von Hutten fled to the little lone isle of Uffau, in the lone lake of Zurich ; or when the holy and the good, exiled from many lands in Europe, fled behind the mountains of Jura and the Alps, into the retreat to which King and Kaiser or Pope could not follow ; and when in very deed Geneva was the Engedi of the martyred Church ! Do not the stories of such men and such times read like the song of David by the fountain of the hart or the wild goat ? Those times have passed ; never may they return ! Our sense of freedom now seems even grotesque, fantastic, unreal ; it wants that quiet sense of honour which was its glory. But may we all have something so dear to heart and conscience that, rather than part with it, we would fly to our Engedi, to the solitudes of rocks, to the companionship of eagles and of beasts, and from whence we would lift up our prayer, " Judge me, O God, and plead my cause ; oh, send out Thy light and truth ; let them lead me, and bring me to Thy holy hill." And not only so : there are not only the outlaws of society and of law, but of circumstance—those who dwell in some Engedi, far removed from city spire or minster clock. There are even in England desolate dales where no man passes by—the scattered hamlet in the lonely valley, the lone house, or the two or three neighbours in the remote outlying farm

or field. You would perhaps be astonished did you know how in the lone islands round our coast, of which we have so many, or on the mountain passes like Ennerdale, or Borrowdale, or Kirkstone, in remote Welsh and Scotch and Northumbrian moors, there are spots where man lives solitary, seldom sees the face of men, and very seldom a house of God or a minister of God. In the far-off wastes of Iceland, in the forest clearings of Australia, or the backwoods of America,—there, if amidst those fastnesses, those forest scenes, the heart pants as David's heart panted for the holy water-brooks, there is Engedi, there is this village realized ; the hymn never swells from the full congregation, no ministerial rites commend, but the heart goes out to God—to “God the exceeding joy.” Nor less in the sequestered room where sickness pines,—where the “prisoner of the Lord” from any cause is confined,—a prayer, a hymn, a chapter, a stray visit, may make it Engedi, the fountain of the hart. From the everlasting hills the fountain flows, and peace sings like a river, as David's God still says to the soul, “He also shall be like a tree planted by a river, bringing forth its fruit in season, whose hope the Lord is.”

But “deep calleth unto deep”; it was the voice of the Jordan he heard at Engedi. Yonder he saw it—the river of the prophets and the river of the gospel—winding along the marshy plain of Esdraelon ; and we ought to stay in some of the villages on its banks,

but the limitations of these pages forbid our doing so. Bethabara especially ought to be our resting-place, and it is very interesting to notice how all the Scriptural characteristics are verified by travellers on its banks who, even in our day, have attempted either to navigate its waves or to explore its shores.

There is no river on the earth like the Jordan. It is not long,—two hundred miles following all its windings, but not more than sixty in actual distance. But there is no other river like the Jordan. The Nile rolls its long serpent-like way, blessing Egypt with fruitfulness; the Tiber plunges through Rome; the Arno, sleepy and uninteresting, winds its way through Florence; the Seine rolls its mighty length for hundreds of miles; beautiful exceedingly, and mighty and majestic in association, the silver Thames flows on from her small hilly basin to the Medway and the sea. I need not name the great American father of rivers, or the African Zambezi. The Jordan transcends them all.

It is a mysterious river. It flows into the Dead Sea; but its waters are the sweetest of all waters. It is a singular historical river. Over it, amidst circumstances of thrilling pomp and majestic interest, this was the river crossing which the tribes passed to their promised inheritance. It is a wondrously beautiful river. Twelve beautiful islands shine like gems on its waters; its banks extend now by the lowering rock and crag, and now by the soft and charming scene of

the oleander and the palm, echoing at evening to the sweet notes of the bulbul, the nightingale of Syria, or through the dense, deep, impassable cane brakes and papyri, once the haunt of the lion and the tiger, and still of the jackal, the hyena, and the crocodile. Yet a scene all suffused in beauty, and flowing beneath the glory of the Syrian sun or the more tender lustre of the Syrian moon. But it is the most mystical of rivers; it has always stood as a type of that transition from this world to the world of spirits which is supposed to have its symbol in the entrance into Canaan. Over its waters, or through and in the midst of them, passed the priests and the ark, and the armies of the Israelites: "they went through the flood on foot." The prophet Elijah swept the waters with his mantle, and they divided and rolled hither and thither, and the prophets went safely through; and when the younger prophet saw his master ascend, he returned and smote the waters again with his mantle and divided them again—type of the faith which sustains when it beholds the beloved depart, and restores to the world of active life whence they have departed. It is the most mystical of rivers—type of the new life here as well as the new life there. Here John invoked first to the waters of repentance; and here Jesus was acknowledged by the descending Dove, when to Him the Holy Spirit was given, and Jesus was glorified. There is no river like the Jordan: it has somewhat changed its character; its banks have lost their

ancient fertility, to which not only the Scriptures but Josephus and Tacitus bear witness; and while overflowings and risings still occur, those wonderful Nile-like overflowings of the banks seem to have ceased, but the rapids thunder still from fall to fall, and mysterious circumstances, inexplicable to science, justify the ancient name—Jordan, the Descender.

XVII.

Bethlehem, the Village of the Corn-fields.

“And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda ; for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.”—MATTHEW ii. 6.

EVEN nature is Evangelical :—

How awful is the thought of the wonders underground,
Of the mystic changes wrought in the silent, dark profound ;
How each thing is upward tending, by necessity decreed,
And the world's support depending on the shooting of a seed !

There is, as Lamartine says, a *logos* in nature ; there is an infinitely Divine symbolism and imagery in the mountains, forests, and lakes, and fields. But the villages of the Bible are evangelical ; we may see God in the East ; the villages themselves preach the gospel of the grace of God ; their characters, events, and lessons are all tinted with the glow of evangelical scenery.

Now we have to do with a village on a hill or hill-

side, about six miles from Jerusalem, immediately on the road going down into Egypt. Picture to yourself two hills, and the abrupt valley between ; now on the one hill stands a convent with a cluster of buildings around it, but all that is of these later ages. Formerly the village stood only on the one hill,—a little cluster of homesteads on the hill and hill-side ; the rugged, precipitous rocks do not interfere with the wealth and richness of the soil. It was an ordinary little Judæan village, so small there was little room for any crowds who sought habitation or shelter there ; below it lay the corn-fields, along its slopes still spread the vineyards ; it is a rich and fruitful soil, it is the world's metropolis. Roman emperors were said to be born in the purple, but if the purple chamber in which those princes were born commanded the deference of succeeding ages, how much more this village !

For this is Bethlehem—that is, the House of Bread : its name implies that if the village was small it was rich in those productions which are the staff and stay of a people ; and if you visited it to-day you would find most of its features unchanged from the old times of the Bible story, consecrated by the affections of so many passing generations, and yet possessing no marked characteristics in itself. There is the same green carpet of the old shepherd days ; there flows through the valley, from its spring near to Jerusalem, the sacred brook Kedron ; yonder is El Furiedis, the

Frank mountain, the Hill of Paradise ; and small as the village is, it is an astonishing centre towards which converge innumerable points of interest making it a most holy soil.

When we were in the village of Mamre, we could not but notice how all its interest gathered, concentrated, and converged around one patriarch, the family of Abraham ; but still the interests radiated out from thence, converging, outraying. It is remarkable that the same lesson is taught us at Bethlehem ; shall I say by a reverse method ? From a most insignificant circumstance the family spreads out ; it is all the story of one family which gathers round that spot,—one family, but its members emerging through successive generations. Bethlehem is first remarkable to us for a tomb ; they still show you Rachel's tomb ; it was a wild spot of farmsteads in the old nomadic days of which you read (Genesis xxxv. 16). The old man Jacob referred to it, memory pointing back to those green fields, when he was dying ; as he was travelling to it, it was then a little hamlet, a resting-place they hoped to reach ; but the weary mother could go no farther, so she gasps, " Let me lie here." Ay, as well here as anywhere in a time and clime when man and nature lived together so fraternally and well. So the tents were pitched, and there the mother's soul departed, there was Benjamin born, there the patriarch wrung his hands as Laban's daughter, his beloved companion of the distant fields and the

old well, passed from his side. Do you wonder so trifling a circumstance is mentioned? Because she was one of the mothers of the tribes of Israel. There she rested, by the roadside they placed the cairn, over the heart that had beat fondly and the eye that had wept and gleamed lovingly. So—

“ Rachel lies in Ephrath’s land
Beneath her lonely oak of weeping.”

And what a point it gives to that time spoken of in prophecy, so dreadfully realized in history, when, at the command of Herod, all the infants in Bethlehem were slain! Rachel, the mother of Bethlehem story, was imagined to feel in her grave the pang for her murdered children, when a voice was heard in Ramah from that spot which was her grave, and just outside Bethlehem the shade of Rachel was beheld “weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted because they were not.” You see it is part of the family story of the place.

There is another story yet more intimately wrought into Jewish history. You can see the black hills of Moab stretching yonder, just opposite; they are thirty-six miles away, they probably seem as ten. There was famine in Bethlehem; there was living there a man, Elimelech; he crossed over with his wife to Moab, his wife bore him two sons, he died, his sons married, they died and left their wives to a world we need not conceive more generous than now. It was

the time of barley-harvest ; two wearied women came through the scattered streets ; perhaps "the task of the reapers was done,"—they were gathered at their doors at day's decline ; the travellers seemed of little account,—one in all the bronzed wealth of Moabitish beauty, one aged and faded. It is Naomi ! "And she said, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara, for the Lord hath dealt very bitterly with me." There stood the village in the harvest-fields, bathed in the glorious light of those skies. And now we enter again and follow the reapers ; but who could think what she would be who follows them, gleaning, praying to glean among the sheaves ! There must have been, I think, some amiable dignity of manner, some grace not unworthy the ancestress of a king, to win those words from the master of the field (Ruth ii. 8). Thomson, in his "Seasons," has woven such a pretty fancy as that of the gleaners and the lord of this region ; but there is more here, for they were married, and when Ruth bore her husband a child we read : "And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it. And the women her neighbours gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi ; and they called his name Obed : he is the father of Jesse, the father of David."* Such was the foundation of Israel's most royal throne. And is there no promise that thus Christ wills it, that from other nations and idolatrous lands His family

* Ruth iv. 16, 17.

should attain its glory? At any rate, you see in this another instance of the family story of the place.

How a little place gathers and holds great memories! There is a charm and power in association, but you must leave the place untouched, so that we may say, there are the fields, there the skies, there the haunts. It is greatly so with the old village of the harvest-fields; it is more unchanged since the days of David than Stratford-on-Avon since Shakespeare, than Elstow since Bunyan, than St. Ives since Cromwell, than Wantage since Alfred. You see the family of David was of some account,—the chief family in the little village; but he was the youngest and most inconsiderable of all. There are the fields in which he kept his flocks. Can you not see him, blithe, muscular, adroit as a panther, a young panther of the wilderness,—but withal, if as fleet and muscular as the panther, as beautiful and gentle as the gazelle? Down those dark ravines stealthily stole the lion in the evening, when “the lions roar after their prey,” but he slew it; prowling from the depths of the forest thicket came the bear, swift marching, but it met the fate of the lion. And the traditions concerning him say that he had a voice loud as the deafening peal of thunder, or soft and sweet and warbling as the nightingales. Hither came Samuel, and found “the youth ruddy and of a fair countenance,” and anointed him with oil in the name of the Lord. Here he sung his

holy psalms, and I think I must read to you an apocryphal psalm,—apocryphal, but beautiful.

“I was small among my brethren, and growing up in my father’s house, I kept my father’s sheep. My hands made the organ, and my fingers shaped the psaltery. And who declared unto my Lord? He, the Lord, heard all things. He sent His angel, and He took me from my father’s sheep; He anointed me in mercy with His unction. Great and goodly are my brethren, but with them the Lord was not well pleased. I went to meet the stranger, and he cursed me by all his idols. But I smote off his head with his own drawn sword, and I blotted out the reproach of Israel.”

For Israel had an incapable king; yet he, too, was a neighbour of David’s in his birth. Azekah was twelve miles away, when to David said his father, “Take now for thy brethren an ephah of this parched corn, and these ten loaves, and run to the camp to thy brethren; and carry these ten cheeses unto the captain of their thousand, and look how thy brethren fare, and take their pledge.”* There they were on either side, and there the giant defying the armies of Israel, striding to and fro like a strong, mischievous clown. Suddenly he is defied. You know the story of the young Bethlehemite: he had his sling with the five well-chosen stones from the brook

* 1 Samuel xvii. 17, 18.

Kedron, I think.* What joy among the hills and farmsteads of Bethlehem as the young villager returned that night! But I hold it as part of the family story of the place.

Travellers in the East, or readers of books referring to the East, soon come to understand what is intended by a Syrian inn, or *khan*. It is not such a place as we call to the imagination when we think of an inn in London, or in any of the great cities of Europe; it is a mere refuge, perhaps most of all like some of the huge cloth-halls of Yorkshire. The term *khan*, indeed, means a lodging for the night, but the requirements for such a lodging differ very greatly in that eastern clime to those which are supposed to be the conditions of comfort in ours. It is not usually a building roofed in; but here is safety from thieves, here man and beast may lodge, here fires may be kindled, coffee and bread, perhaps, obtained, and here the merchant finds a favourable spot to exhibit his wares, and to learn something of neighbouring roads and markets. There are rude landlords who do the honours of these buildings, and pay to their government a tax for permission to do so. Round the building, overcanopying it with their branches—for its walls are seldom high—stand the tall sycamore or oak-trees, whose height indeed usually serves as a kind of landmark to travellers wending their way from a

* 1 Samuel xvii. 40.

distance across the plain. Usually speaking, such buildings are very old; often they are the remnant of a very ancient time, and of a dispersed and vanished family. Even in war they have been usually spared, for they are a kind of necessary hospital; thus we read of the sparing of the house of Chimham by the Babylonians. This was the kind of building described in the Gospels as the inn of Bethlehem, which was overcrowded the night the illustrious young virgin-mother arrived there. And singular indeed seems the probability that she "came unto her own, and her own received her not"! Singular indeed seems the probable history of that old Bethlehem *khan*, or inn!

For there stood, then, in Bethlehem the old family house of Boaz, of Obed, of Jesse; David was born in it. When the sad reverse came over his sceptre, and he yet was spared to return to his throne, Barzillai met him to greet him, and the grateful monarch, anxious to press upon his aged friend some gift—with dignity declined—he commended his son Chimham to him.* David, it would seem, gave to him the old house of Boaz and of Jesse.† In Jeremiah's day it was a public building; it eventually, by tradition, became a *khan* or inn, as such old houses become. And it is more than possible—it is probable—that this was the inn to which Joseph and Mary hastened that evening when the plains and fields of Bethlehem were alive with angels' songs,

* 2 Samuel xix. 37, 38.

† Jeremiah xli. 17.

and in whose innermost inclosure He found no room. Here I must close. But in this last incident we have still an illustration how the family story gathers round the place,—the tomb, the harvest-field, and the wedding, the lyrist, the victor, and the king, and the Salvation.

It is amidst the fields of Bethlehem "the soft-flowing Kedron" holds its way,—the brook or torrent of the Kedron. This was the torrent whose melody the shepherds heard that night "when silence reigned on Judah's hill," when the heavens were all bright with supernatural spheres of flame. Bethlehem may be called the village of the Kedron, and it rolled a more beautiful course than nearer to Jerusalem, to Olivet, or Gethsemane. This is the torrent or the brook over which Jesus passed into the Garden on the fatal, awful night which consummated our salvation; this was the brook of which He was to drink by the way, that He might lift up the head. For Kedron was, as we should say, the *Black water*, and its dark waves heaved with propitiation, as near to Jerusalem it became the receptacle for the ashes and impurities of all the sacrifices.* It rolls, spectral and mystical, before us, and even its insignificance as a brook does not lift it from the sense of terror it conveys.

Thus, as I said at first, the scenery is evangelical, the village is alive with the story of the family; but

* 1 Kings xv. 13; 2 Chron. xv. 16.

it is representative of the family of grace and the family of God. So, I say, God prints eternal lessons on places, often on some spot which seems so small,—but God never teaches us, as man conceives, that dimension is of much account with Him. Not great nations, but small, have ruled the world; and villages furnish principles which shine as celestial lights. Eternal lessons: and now we have to remark again that memories linger when the men have departed.

In the neighbourhood of Bethlehem there is a spot called the Sealed Fountain, and there they still hold a confused tradition of Elijah the prophet—a story which makes even the traditions of men luminous with rays from Divine memories. In the time of the Beni-Israel (*i.e.* the sons or children of Israel), lived a man beloved of God, called Eless or Elias; and God willed to make him a prophet to lead back wanderers to the right way, and said to him, “Arise; go preach the truth. And in order that those hardened sinners may believe thy word, wherever thou shalt go, wherever thou placest thy foot, be the ground never so dry or barren, green herbs and flowers shall spring up; if thou sittest under a withered tree it shall again become green and put forth leaves. Therefore men shall call thee Khedar” (*i.e.* green). So Elias travelled over the country to proclaim the Word of the Lord, and was on his way from Jerusalem to Hebron. Now there was living in that day a mighty sheikh, who by his brutality and cruelty was a terror to the whole neighbour-

hood; and he determined to have the prophet brought to him, not because he was anxious to hear his words, but because he desired to employ the gifts of Elias to his own advantage. And Elias came, when he was seized by the myrmidons of the sheikh, and taken to the palace of the tyrant. And the tyrant said to him, "I will that thou shouldest walk over my lands, for thy footsteps are blessed. To-morrow I myself will conduct thee over them; but seek not to fly, for not even God Himself shall be able to deliver thee out of my hands." After a night had passed in a small, dark prison, Elias was led forth bound with a heavy chain, one end of which was held by the tyrant, and in this humiliating way he was compelled to pursue the journey. But lo! at every step that the man of God took, the crops withered, the herbage shrivelled, and the trees were blasted. And this is the cause of the sterility of the land to this day. And infuriated at this, the sheikh meditated throwing his prisoner into the pools which are called Solomon's, for they were near that spot. But Elias, worn with fatigue, asked that he might descend into the Sealed Fountain, to quench his thirst, and the tyrant granted his request, but still retained the chain in his hand, that he might not escape. But now see a miracle again,—for, behold, scarcely had Elias reached the bottom, when the narrow watercourse opened out to afford him an easy passage, along which he walked without hindrance from the chain; for behold, it lengthened

as he advanced, and he drank of the water, and his bands fell off, and the rock closed behind him and separated him from his persecutor. And since then Elias has travelled, though invisible, over the whole world, and every place is still made verdant where the prophet treads. In this fantastic legend is preserved the memory of the prophet Elijah, and the tyrant Ahab, and the seizing of the vineyard of Naboth; and such legends linger in the tents and villages of the Holy Land.

XVIII.

Magdala, and the Villages of the Lake.

“And He took ship, and came into the coasts of Magdala.”—
MATT. xv. 39.

BUT the villages of the wonderful lake : we have not yet approached them ; and, indeed, all of them of which we read in the life and labours of our Lord are now heaps of ruins ; scarcely one can be identified without a discussion ; even the larger towns are undistinguishable ruins. It is but a little sheet of water, in comparison with which even some of the lakes of Switzerland and Italy,—Geneva and Zurich, Como and Maggiore,—are as inland seas. Yet the fame and splendour of their villages must yield to those of Gennesaret ; and now it is apparently impossible to explore it on either side ; only one, the western side, is accessible to the traveller, the eastern is in the possession of the Bedouin, and only two travellers appear to have with any success attempted to pierce its mysteries there. Perhaps any who found themselves in that region would still meet with

dangerous wanderers, like the Gadarenes of old, "exceeding fierce."

Life has retired from the Lake of Gennesaret, but in the time of our Lord its banks and borders were alive with villages; in some sense it was a kind of metropolis of the world,—certainly a metropolitan district. On its borders Roman emperors had their palace, large towns gave the bustle and enchantment of an active, stirring life to the whole scene; there was Capernaum; there was Bethsaida; the life of many nations came flowing along that spot, the recreation ground of many parts of Asia Minor; tribes of human life poured along on either side the lake; we read continually of our Lord crossing from one side to the other, while, as in the great towns, the civilization of that age was fairly represented. In the lone villages sloping down to the shore the fisherman pursued his calling; there, in the bright light, they are brought before us mending their nets, casting them into the sea, or pushing out from the shore; the waters of the lake then, as they are now, were singularly abundant in fish.

The eye will never weary of attempting to gaze on that singular little inland sea; it seems as if sacred history had no more lovely and venerable spot; profane history, it seems, has nothing so consecrated and charming,—such hallowed echoes sound along its shores, such sacred visions gleam along its waters. For a brief period it distinctly emerges to our view; but

during that period its history is crowded with incident, like that of the one Divine life which moved and meditated and ministered there. And the spot was and is still worthy of the enchantment which it creates even in the minds and hearts of those who have not seen it. One of the most favoured spots on the face of the earth for natural climate, a strange mingling of happy latitudes gives fertility to the lofty and fruitful terraces which rise all around it ; it is the place of the vineyard and the sheep-walk, and many kinds of rural labour may find occupation there. Forsaken as it is, there are prophets living who are assured that so rich and promising is its situation, so fruitful the soil of its surrounding shores, that life must set in upon its borders again, and Gennesaret teem with the vivacity of the days of old ; at present its waves only break upon desolate coasts and villages from whence all interest, save that which gathers from the past, has ebbed away. But this, as Lamartine, perhaps with something of his usual strong colouring of speech, says, is the sea of Jesus Christ. And it is so ; it was called the Sea of Tiberius ; his palace was reared on its side. But where is Tiberius ?—and who and what was he ? What word of his have we ever spoken by its waters ?—what do we know of any walks of his through its orchards or by its shores ? And on the other hand, what words of Christ are on record, and what circumstances of His life, all emanating from this place ! And it is this which lifts it from its isolation ; therefore myriads of

feet have trod reverently through its wild solitudes; but for this it would be no more to us than a remote upland tarn in an inaccessible wilderness; we should care no more for its waters than for the wild dashing of the waves of the Oregon or the Ontario. And this neighbourhood especially holds like an urn the memory of Christ; many other places retain, as we have instanced, the charm of His presence,—this especially. It seems as if here we realize more of His continued active life: see those mountains,—yonder is the spot up into which He retired at night to pray; see that path,—along those slopes He descended during the night or early morning to the shore; this is the lake upon whose agitated waters He walked. The lake was all alive with boats and small ships then; this is the spot where “He entered into a ship and spoke, while the whole multitude stood before Him on the shore”; here He lifted up His finger and pointed to a labourer, and turned him into a text, saying, “Behold, a sower went forth to sow.” It was at evening, after He had preached during the day on these shores, that as the last sunbeams were gilding or drawing out into twilight tenderness the scene, they brought out the sick into the villages as He passed along; along here moved His kind step of dignity and beauty; among these spots fell the sweet, tender glances of that rich, wonderful eye; it was here they “ marvelled to hear the gracious words that proceeded out of His mouth.” The place is instinct with Him.

Here also the rule holds well of the analogy so often traced between the labourer and the field in which he followed his pursuits ; places which have been inhabited by illustrious men seem to retain a murmur, a power in the air,—the man seems to live there still. Who has not felt this on many a spot ?—a pre-eminent mind seems to brood over the place : this must be especially so with the whole scenery of Gennesaret. Probably a visit and a wandering there somewhat disturbs the impression, for indeed the region appears wonderfully to have changed, and solitude and silence have usurped the place of animation and society. But even there the old impression comes back again, and we perhaps may be even sure of this,—that we see more of the place as it was when the great Captain of our Salvation was there, than if it had sustained ever since its excitement and busy life of pleasure and trade. Here, at any rate, we can appeal to the undisturbed waters, to the ruined villages suspended on the steep banks, to the clear skies, to the still, peaceful little hamlets which yet line the terraces and the cliffs, and where yet scattered shepherds milk their cows and goats. This, then, is that nook to which Christ gave the preference for His life of labour to all other places of the world ; all things are here of Him ; by night and by day the still and solitary villages are alive with His presence. The hymns and songs of mankind seem indeed to be hushed here, but nature retains her sway and chants her song ; and especially the story

of grace rises in a perpetual refrain from the beat of these melodious waters.

Thus it will be seen how many a spot on the borders of the lake has its story, and hence to us its inspiration and its charm ; one little miserable hamlet has given a name sacred and famous throughout all Christendom. The more famous sites are with difficulty identified ; Tiberias is only a cluster of rude and ruined houses, not much more than a miserable village ; but *Magdala*, the village of Mary, out of whom Christ cast seven devils, retains its name still—Mejdol. What it was in our Lord's day we can only surmise ; at present Dr. Thomson speaks of it as a wretched hamlet of a dozen low huts huddled into one, and these already tumbling into ruins ; further, he says, as devils were expelled from Mary, so still evil spirits of some sort must possess the inhabitants, for they are about the worst specimens in the country ; and yet they dwell amidst these sublime scenes, and on the shore of this silvery lake. *Magdala* : how famous the name has become through Mary Magdalene ! Scarce the name of any place in the Sacred Volume is more associated with and inwrought to popular speech ; its subject gleaming on innumerable canvases of innumerable galleries ; associated with a special and peculiar order of penitent, and used for the purpose of pointing the power and the character of the Redeemer as the Saviour of sinners. This was one of the incidents of the lake—probably a double illustration of the

Saviour's power, an illustration at once of His power to cure and His power to console ; to her, to many, He no doubt said, as He said yonder at the foot of the mountain of the transfiguration, in another instance of evil possession, "Come out of her, and go no more into her." And certainly from her continued affection to Him, alike before and after His death, and after His resurrection, she must have heard Him say, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Nature often, where it does not soothe and calm, irritates and tosses the mind into frenzy. What beset Mary we do not know,—perhaps something in the very nature of the wild climate itself ; it seems to have been directly opposite to Magdala, as nearly as can be determined, that the country of Gadara stretched. That poor wild madman who haunted the tombs, and whom no chains could bind, was a similar creation of infernal malignity, and a similar illustration of the Saviour's gentle majesty, to the rescued and ransomed Mary ; clothed and in their right mind, of them both it may be said : "These are they who follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth." Wild in all their mien and attire when Jesus found them, so gentle and changed when He left them ; over either it seems as if the Lord retained a singular victory. The possessor of the Gadarean said, "We are legion" ; and from Mary were expelled seven. Of what nature ? So we may fancy Rousseau before the rocks of Miellerae on the banks of Geneva's

lovely lake: was he not mad there? Morbid and miserable, every genial and gentle influence of nature vexing him to torture, her light and melody, her winds and waters, stirring a self-torturing madness within him; a nature very like a woman's, subtly seizing upon every circumstance and scene to prey upon itself. And at the other end of the lake is another of these vain self-torturers, whose soul was a whole Gadarean swinery in itself,—Voltaire, whose vanity drove him mad at Fernex. If nature does not cure us she curses us. Byron on the same spot pours out his musical morbid madness in *Manfred*: "The spirits I have raised abandon me." Perhaps Mary was some one such as these; she could have been no common character, born in that little village on the crag, or she could not have imprinted her name so indelibly in the Gospels, and in the history of the early church, and throughout all church tradition; she hovers like an unspoken poem; for her sake the village is lifted out of obscurity. Mary of Magdala: and who but for Mary would ever have heard of Magdala? When our Lord yonder met the man coming from Gadara, and wrought that mighty cure on him, the man desired to follow Him, but Jesus said, "Go thy way; go home and tell thy friends how great things Jesus hath done for thee." But Mary appears to have been by no means confined to her hamlet: how amazing is the victory when calm, ineffable and sweet, settles down upon a nature hitherto so storm-tossed and

passionate, and when the quiet activities of holiness take possession of a spirit which had only compelled the body to pace to and fro restlessly, in the wild and futile wanderings of despair. No spot of the lake seems to me therefore to hold a stronger interest than this, deserted as it is now, and dark and ominous as are all its associations ; such a spot in the day of our Lord was not what it is now,—a place of no importance ; then it was most likely an active little fishing village, with, the name would suggest, some importance attached to it ; the ruin of the old watch-tower, or a kind of lighthouse, which gave the name to the village, still stands over it on the plain ; and hence sweeps along above the shore the fair rich spot known to us as the plain of Gennesaret, extending only for about three miles. It is not an unsuitable name, considering the story and tradition of the place ; that watch-tower of the village may be regarded as something like a guiding light to all sin-stricken and desolate and oppressed hearts ; and the memory of the Magdalen may be a consolation to many whose boat is beating about upon the angry and chafing sea, and who are longing to find the serenity of the shore. Stanley has noticed the happy but unintentional coincidence between Correggio's celebrated picture of the Magdalen in the cave, and the limestone caves of this immediate spot. But indeed it is scarcely thus that the Magdalen has become typical, since to us, in the history of the church, scarcely as a morbid,

weeping recluse, as a cloistered, cave-confined nun do we conceive her—rather as the active, intrepid woman with a message of love upon her lips, and a heart of radiant and cheerful gratitude. Surely so she shines out in the Gospels, and surely thus she becomes the ancestress of that line of holy women, active and saintly, who, in all ages and in most churches, never troubling themselves much about the refinements of scholastic theology, have put all their passions to sleep, by the sacred spell of a waking heart intent on doing good, bearing their message of mercy on the lip, and the sweet ministrations of charity in the hand,—the Saint Filomenas bearing the white lily of their grace and goodness.

The Saviour chose these shores for His retreat and work. In some part of this region, says Dean Stanley, the home of Christ was situated; in what exact part He fixed His residence we do not know, but certainly just here, among the simple people: we have no knowledge of His ministration in the more stately town and palace-seat of Tiberias. It was an illustration of the growing servility of the people, although that emanated from the more alien race of the Herods, that the Roman emperor gave his name to the lake and to much of the region round about; the Lake of Gennesaret became the Sea of Tiberias. Not to the children of fashion, the hangers-on of the Roman court, or the flatterers and parasites of Herodian ambition, did Christ give much of His ministry, but

“to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Among the lone fishermen He no doubt had His home, and from their numbers He selected His first apostles. “Passing by” and “beholding them mending their nets,” in the little bay, He threw His spell over them, and said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” And so said Peter, who was one of them, “Lord, we have left all and followed Thee.” The all does not seem much to have left,—a boat or two, a net or two,—but it was their all, and it was left for no purpose of ambition; these fishermen, at any rate, never forsook their calling or their craft that they might cultivate the acquaintance of the great, become pleasantly familiar with the ways of cities, and further the purposes of worldly ambition. Popes of Rome, and the great hierarchies of the church, have indeed ever since called themselves the descendants of the fishermen, in memory of their descent from the men who trimmed their sails on these seas and coasted along these shores. But it sounds something ludicrous; for these first fishers of the church all lived poor, and, it is believed, all died martyrs; happier, sense says, would have been their life had they continued to prosecute their humble toil by the village of Magdala. Yet from these obscure and humble places what power they carried forth! How differently read their words, how differently look their works, to the insanity of Franciscans, the cruelty of Dominicans, the craft of Jesuits! They went forth from their fisheries, and

they succeeded, for their deeds and words are with us to this day. It is very significant to notice at once where the Lord looked for His workers and whom He selected; singular indeed it seems that in such an age, and in such villages, should be found men clearly not destitute of genius, full of great natural force and strength of character, in whom if we notice in their first intercourse with our Lord some coarseness of manner and of speech, we find it yielding to a grandeur of soul, an elevation of sentiment, showing to us how love exalts and refines. They abide; their work abides.

Standing and preaching on the shores of the lake, in some such village as we have conceived, our Lord may be heard saying, "And thou, Capernaum, which exaltest thyself to heaven, shalt be cast down to hell,"—to the grave, to ruin, was no doubt what He intended we should understand. It is literally so; the very site of the grand old city is quite a matter of dispute; wherever it is, whichever of the ruins concerning which eminent and learned travellers have disputed may be the ancient spot, it is not only unknown with absolute certainty, but it is cast down to utter and entire ruin. The village at any rate survives in knowledge and in hallowed memories and in sacred lessons; Tiberias and Capernaum have wholly passed away. "Woe unto thee, Capernaum!" said our Lord, "it shall be more tolerable for Sodom than for thee!" and travellers have remarked how literally true this is,—for the name and perhaps the ruins of Sodom,

although so much more ancient, are to be discovered; and, located on the shores of the Dead Sea, Capernaum is utterly lost.

Jesus found little acceptance in the cities; nay, may it not be said He did not take very kindly to them?— and, make of it what we may, He loved the simple people and the simple places; His own tender and Divine heart overflowed for all human hearts and human sorrows. He preached His Gospel of peace in Jerusalem, and performed His gifts of healing there; and no doubt any child of the great city might be assured of His love and help, His “Go in peace, thy faith hath saved thee.” But again we say He did not take kindly to the great towns. There are some things in Christ which look like a Hebrew, there is scarcely a thing in Him which seems to connect Him either with the Hebrews or with any particular race; but the Hebrews were country people, and Christ was eminently a countryman. He seems to have shared a Hebrew’s prejudices against that Herodian city of Tiberias; He kept aloof from it, He wandered all round it and about it, and throughout the whole of the lake country; and we may suppose He sometimes entered it, but we have no knowledge that He did. We may be sure that the courtly, sceptical Roman was there, and we know His word, “I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” And yet Gennesaret itself and all the country round about lay under a taint; this was Isaiah’s “Galilee of

the Gentiles"; the Sea of Tiberias was the lake of Galilee; and a kind of brand was upon it, because, from its situation, its population had become mixed with the heathen world—with people from Phœnicia, from Tyre and Sidon. But there was the difference; these still were they who needed a guide, a helper, and a healer. In the cities, especially in Tiberias, were those who would only hear to doubt and hear to scorn; and these our Lord seems to have left, while yet this very region was one of the best fitted for carrying the echoes of the Gospel He came to proclaim to the heathen, scarcely less than to the Jewish world. The whole of this region was peculiarly the Lord's country, beyond the coast of the lake, and the plains lying immediately round about it, "the land of Zabulon, the land of Naphtali, Galilee beyond Jordan,"—all were comprised with this region within the bounds of the territory of the people who "sat in darkness, but saw a great light, who dwelt in the valley of the shadow of death, but upon whom the light shined"; and as the prophecy was assuredly divinely fulfilled in the advent of our Lord there, so also there seemed a remarkable fitness between His work and the region chosen for the fulfilment of it.

Still most beautiful is the lake of Gennesaret; it moved the rapture of Josephus, who describes the slopes of its hills covered with luxuriant groves, the fig, the palm, the olive, the walnut, pomegranate, apricot, and vine; melons and wheat, barley, millet,

and tobacco grow abundantly on its shores. The temperature of the shores varies at different points ; in some points it is tropical, and the productions of the tropics may be found there. The Mahometans were wont to speak of four places on the earth where Paradise might be found : the Lake of Gennesaret was one. The Jews used to say God loved that sea above all other seas. National predilections often speak in the strong language of exaggeration, imagination, and hyperbole ; but something more seems to vindicate and justify this extraordinary language, when we remember that here our Lord fixed His retreat and found His home,—this makes it even more beautiful than the oleanders which everywhere fringe its brink. Certainly He must have loved these villages ; and now that the universal stillness, a wonderful and almost supernatural calm, seem, everywhere to pervade the scene—a boat scarcely ever ruffling the surface of the pure silvery waters, and all around it testifying to the change which has passed over the whole scene—it still seems a spot we can conceive of as fitted to the purpose and the ministrations of our Lord. A little mountain urn, small indeed compared with the great inland seas, the mighty lakes of America or Africa,—as wide again, but not much longer, than our own lake of Windermere,—exciting a marvel sometimes as to how its human life could be maintained ; its Chorazin and Bethsaida both, like others we have mentioned, among the lost cities of the lake.

Still it is suspended there among the hills—one of the most wonderful and beautiful memorials of the life of Christ in the Holy Land. Once or twice it is mentioned slightly in the Old Testament; then early in the Gospels it comes forth distinctly into view. And so, in the writings of Josephus. It is mentioned by one or two patristic writers. Its shores echoed to the war-cries of the Crusaders. But in fact it is only in the life of Christ it is known, and known only in that connexion as He went to and fro in the midst of its villages. Its great towns He held up, surrounded by the lurid light, for the Divine judgments; amidst its villages He moved, teaching, warning, and healing. So that it may be said the history of the lake is concentrated within the three brief years of our Lord's ministry; a period not long, indeed, in time, but crowded with events even there which faith hails with rapture, and doubt, with all its discussions and casuistries, finds it difficult to explain away.

XIX.

Nazareth, the Village of the Incarnation.

“And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up.”—
LUKE iv. 16.

“**H**OW beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of Him that bringeth good tidings.” Yet once more we feel how applicable are those words to that spot. The plain of Esdraelon was the Dartmoor of Israel. Israel was small in comparison with England, but the plain answers sufficiently to that splendid and magnificent region running along the western edge of Devonshire. Nazareth, the most honoured of all the villages of the Bible, nestled, insignificant, and obscure, an upland vale among the hills of Galilee, but really on the edge of the plain of Esdraelon overlooking Zebulon. It is a basin lost in the hollow of about fifteen hills, an upland hollow and basin, the mountains above it, the mountain plains rolling beneath it, the hill country of Galilee.

How the Evangelical stories of the Bible impress themselves on the scenes and the whole life; for, as I

have said, the whole of the scenery has the print of the story upon it. And I have called Nazareth the Village of the Incarnation ; and you may say, " Jesus of Nazareth," with more propriety than " Jesus of Bethlehem," because, although He was born in Bethlehem, in Nazareth He spent the first thirty years of His life, and even the life of His public ministration was passed in its neighbourhood ; it was in " the land of Zebulon," so spoken of in prophecy in Isaiah, literally true as it was, there " the people that walked in darkness saw a great light,"* And it is a singular thing, the name of the village is yet the designation of Christ : " He shall be called a Nazarene." It was the designation given by His Apostles,—" Jesus of Nazareth " ; and singular, in this place, where they sought to slay Him, more of the people are Christians in this day than in any other part of the Holy Land ; nearly all are Christians. And there are those who, in their simple faith too, hold the Gospel He then first proclaimed. Nazareth is the Village of the Incarnation, because His life was developed there, in that quiet spot ; there the grain of mustard-seed was first planted, which has branched out over the whole world. So truly it may be called the Village of the Incarnation ; here more especially do we realize the truth of the text, " And the Word was made flesh and *dwelt* among us." Lamartine

* Isaiah ix. 1, 2.

was a very enthusiastic poet; but the enthusiasm into which he glowed is surely more than pardonable,—it is the only fitting and appropriate action here. Reaching this spot, he says:—"I remained for some minutes in silent contemplation, in which all the sceptical and Christian thoughts of my life as a man rushed so powerfully upon my mind that it was impossible for me to individualize any one in particular. Only those words escaped from my lips: 'And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.' I pronounced them with that profound, sublime, and grateful sentiment which they are so well calculated to inspire; and the spot so naturally causes them, that I was struck on my arrival in the evening at the Latin Church to find them engraven in letters of gold on the marble table of the subterranean altar in the house of Mary and Joseph. I kissed it in silence, and shed a few tears of repentance, love, and hope, on this ground which has seen the shedding of so many—ground which has dried up so many on asking from it, a little truth and love."

Nazareth kindles enthusiasm in the bosoms of men of very varied characters and creeds. Even Rénan, in his romance which he is pleased to call the "Life of Jesus," becomes enthusiastic here. He notices the exquisite beauty of the women who still meet at the fountain, where no doubt Mary every day took her place with her jar on her shoulder; he speaks of Nazareth as an enchanted circle—the cradle of the

kingdom of God, and believes that there, where sleep Joseph the carpenter and thousands of forgotten Nazarenes, should the world, remaining Christian, ever wish to replace by authentic holy places the mean and apocryphal sanctuaries reared by the piety of the Dark Ages: it is on the height of Nazareth it will rear its temple.

There is a spot, a hill over Nazareth—we may be sure the young feet of the Lord often climbed that hill—the air is clear and pure, and there the eye becomes aware of the whole enchanting scene; there is the magnificent plain of Esdraelon, the battle-field of the Bible; there is the round top of Hebron, and there is Tabor, and there are the blood-stained and dewless heights of Gilboa; and there on the opposite scene are the mountains of Samaria, and there is Carmel towering in height, looking towards the sea; and there the Mediterranean glows and gleams in the light, and Kishon, that ancient river, sweeps away through the narrow valley on the other side; and onward, seas of hills rise over all, and majestic Hermon with its icy crown. Such was the scene on which beyond a doubt the young boy Jesus often climbed to gaze. You may sit there in imagination yourself. There is the village below you in which passed His childhood and early manhood; there is the fountain from which beyond a doubt He often filled His pitcher; His eyes often wandered over the splendid prospect from hence over all the adjoining hills. He

looked over yonder plain where the garments of the warrior had often been rolled in blood, the battle-fields of Beth-bara, of Kishon, of Gilboa, and of Gideon, Saul, and David ; there the sea, studded with the swift ships to convey to foreign shores,—to our isle and to remote continents,—His Gospel. Such is Nazareth. Dr. Robinson, the eminent author of “Biblical Researches,” tells us how on one fine Sabbath morning he climbed the hill, no doubt so often trod by those most hallowed feet, and lost himself for hours in surveying that inspiring scene. Who does not envy him ? What the village at the foot may be I know not—probably disappointing ; but on those mountains surely we should say, “It is good to be here.”

It is probable that Joseph died during the first thirty years of our Lord's life. “After Joseph's death, the date of which is unknown, it seems clear that Jesus continued to labour at His father's trade, going about the country with His axe, His chisel, His measuring-line, and His rule, seeking such work as a Jew could find, and doing it with all His might. A carpenter's tasks were of many kinds—making benches for the synagogues, shaping poles and beams for tents, cutting lintels for doorways, mending roofs, making stools and shelves for domestic use. In labours like these Jesus was engaged till He had completed His thirtieth year. It must not be thought that because He tramped about Galilee,

mending benches in the synagogues and boats on the lake, that His occupations were considered mean. They were in fact holy. Every Jew, from the peasant in his hut to the high-priest in his palace, learned some craft. If Jesus was a carpenter, Paul was a tent-maker, Rabbi Ishmael was a needle-maker, Rabbi Simon, a weaver. One of the most despised of all employments among the Jews was that of tending sheep and goats; yet David had been taken from the hill-side by Samuel, and after being a shepherd had been made a king. Compared with the occupation of David, that of Jesus was exalted; for the craft of a carpenter was one of those noble grades from the proficients in which it was lawful to elect high-priests.”*

But see then what honour God sets upon obscurity. This is the world's most consecrated spot; surely, as has been said, the features of that spot even have had an influence in forming the destinies of the world. “It was there, in the fields below the village, the gorgeous and yet modest attire of the lilies charmed Him; there in the gardens He noticed how the smallest of all seeds grew into the greatest of all herbs. There, outside the house, He saw the two women grinding at one mill, inside, the woman hiding the leaven in the dough. There, in the market-place, He had seen five sparrows sold for two

* Hepworth Dixon, “The Holy Land.”

farthings. The sheep-walks of the hills and the vineyards of the lower valleys had given to Him illustrations of the good shepherd and the vine-dresser. The observations of thirty years there were treasured up to be drawn upon in due time, and turned into the lessons by which the world was to be taught wisdom." * Hence were supplied the texts from which He spoke, the ever-renewed texts for mankind. So obscure the place was, and had, it is believed, been frequently a refuge for the mountain robber, that the question had grown into a proverb, "Can any good come out of Nazareth?" And all this came out of it; and this was the hill country, to which went the Angel of the Annunciation—obscure, and yet so near, not far from the very centre of the world's movements, and yet exempted from their pressure. Herod's court was in full view from Nazareth—and yet it was obscure. Year after year passed on, the very likeness of what you now call a monotonous and dreary life; we know that it was occupied by our Lord with His reputed father's toil; this also was in the purposes of the Incarnation. This was the Incarnation, not merely taking our flesh, but surely giving a typical embodiment of the Divine order of existence; surely very significant, that His human education went on in the lowliest obscurities of a village. I said monotonous, dreary.

* Dr. Hanna's "Earlier Years of the Life of our Lord," p. 383.

Oh no! Life only becomes monotonous when it is loveless,—only becomes dreary when it becomes unloving. Rather the conspicuous lives become dreary and monotonous, they have so little to occupy the heart. George Herbert's little church and parsonage were not monotonous, nor was Eugénie Guérin's old-world house and broken château. There are noble heroisms and great martyrdoms in some village scenes. Our Lord seems to teach us to be still and to wait; there is no stream on earth but finds its channel. True Greatness knows how to be great in little things; Pride waits for great opportunities to become great, and waits in vain.

We have spoken of the enthusiasm of Lamartine in his visit to Nazareth; an enthusiasm perhaps even more intense and more sustained was awakened in the mind of the philosophic author of "Scripture Lands in Relation to their History"; and the sentiments elicited on the spot are developed in a most beautiful and richly instructive little monograph.* The author has most devoutly and closely analysed every information given to us of the Divine life unfolded there, and has shown "how there He came into definite possession of man's personal life, and disclosed its true embodiment"; and how, years after, in the very likeness of what are regarded now as dreary lives, was He thus quietly, sedulously

* "Nazareth, its Life and its Lessons."

occupied with dull monotonous work, which has nothing to commend it except the claims of duty and faithfulness. Amidst the most trying intercourse with uncongenial companions, through all those years, "He did not His own will, but the will of His Father who had sent Him." There He was straitened, till the baptism was accomplished.

This little village lets us into His habits of life. He did not disdain holy service. He whom all succeeding times have worshipped, we read, attended the synagogue of His little village. The service had become laden with many superstitions. He listened to the expositions of the Law. One thinks He must have heard many a bad sermon; but through all those years He listened. He used the Church ordinances. In this He "did not please Himself"; but He listened, watched, and waited; and very affecting is the account of the first sermon He preached to them there.

Nazareth illustrates to us how long a Divine life,—even Christ's own life,—may be lived even in a village with every eye upon it, and be yet utterly unknown. Singular, they quite misunderstood His words. He rose to speak some words of comfort to them, He cited instances which might have encouraged them, but "there was a man in the synagogue with an unclean spirit," a spirit of wrath. The devil in the house of God, the unclean spirit in the house of the Lord, turning the place of peace into a place of wrath. What a dreadfully suggestive thought, sometimes in

the minister himself, the unclean spirit. Remember all these instances, the narratives; these words are crucial, because that which happened then may occur again. Think, a spirit in the presence of Christ, knows Him and hates Him—rouses the passions of the multitude even in the house of God against Him—turns the very texts of the Divine Word into vehement battle-cries against the Author of them—hears Christ preach and seeks to kill Him; for Christ here, in Nazareth, suffered His first martyrdom—hurrying Him from the synagogue, they bore Him along to the brow of the hill. They point out the Hill of Precipitation, two miles distant: the story of the Gospel contradicts the tradition. The hills which girdle the village round have openings, and especially the village lies on the hill-side, there is one whither they bore Him to thrust Him down. But His hour was not yet come. Think you He did not weep then? We know He could weep. Rejected of neighbours and kinsfolk, He visited them again; but again we read, "They were offended at Him."* Invincible prejudice! Surely, if we might suppose it possible anywhere to overcome it, it might be then, the word of the Lord Himself. No! words lost! works lost! Surely He who wept over the city, wept over the village.

All those grand and stirring impressions with which

* Mark vi. 1-6; Matthew xiii.

the spirit is animated, as it visits the consecrated shrines from whence great lives have emerged, to stir by their words or deeds of power their own or future ages, seem to be transcended here. How striking, for example, are the reflections of Lord Lytton, as he thinks of Calvin in Geneva! "It was a warm, clear, and sunny day on which I commenced the voyage of the lake. Looking behind, I gazed on the roofs and spires of Geneva, and forgot the present in the past. What to me was its little community of watchmakers and its little colony of English? I saw Charles of Savoy at its gates, I heard the voice of Berthelier invoking liberty and summoning to arms. The struggle past, the scaffold rose, and the patriot became the martyr. His blood was not spilt in vain. Religion became the resurrection of Freedom. The town is silent; it is under excommunication. Suddenly a murmur is heard: it rises, it gathers, the people are awake, they sweep the streets; the images are broken; Farel is preaching to the Council. Yet a little while, and the stern soul of Calvin is at work within those walls. The loftiest of the reformers, and the one whose influence has been the most wide and lasting, is the earliest of the great tribe of the persecuted the city of the lake receives within her arms. The benefits he repaid, behold them around! Wherever property is secure, wherever thought is free, wherever the ancient learning is revived, wherever the ancient spirit has been caught, you trace the work of the Reforma-

tion, and the inflexible, inquisitive, unconquerable soul of Calvin ! He foresaw not, it is true, nor designed the effects he has produced. The same sternness of purpose, the same rigidity of conscience that led him to reform led him to persecute. The exile of Bolzec and the martyrdom of Servade rest darkly upon his name. But the blessings we owe to the first inquirers compensate their errors. Had Calvin not lived, there would have been, not one, but a thousand Servades ! The spirit of inquiry redeems itself as it advances. Once loosed, it will not stop at the limits to which its early disciples would restrain it ; born with them, it does not grow with their growth, it survives their death, it but commences where they conclude. In one century the flames are for the person ; in another, for the work ; in the third, work and person are alike sacred." If such reflections arise as we ascend to overlook Geneva, what are those which stir in the soul as the traveller ascends to the highest hill overlooking Nazareth ? Even if we entertain a doubt of the divinity of the life unfolded there, what must be the thoughts as we stand on the inglorious theatre on which were enacted deeds so transcendent in their results ! How imperceptible the commencement ! Here then, beneath this firmament, and in yonder narrow and sombre valley, was unfolded the Infant Word ; and there the Word crucified, prepared for its hour and for the hostile encounters with the powers of darkness. Here the maternity of the Virgin went

through its consummation, and here the heavens opened, that the Eternal Nature might wrap itself round with the clouds of time and space, in infancy and youth and manhood. "There is," says Dr. Tristram, "a reality in the associations of Nazareth which stirs the soul of the Christian to its very depths." "It is not the place where the sublimity of the scenery, the depths of the gorges, or the solitude of the forest could fill the boyish mind with wild dreams or enthusiastic visions, suggesting deeds of heroism or feeding the reveries of romance. It was the nursery of One whose mission was to meet man and man's deepest needs on the platform of commonplace daily life."* "Approaching this spot," says Lamartine, "I felt as if something that was cold and dead had just sprung into life again. I felt as we feel when, amidst a thousand strange and unknown figures, we recognise that of a mother or a sister, of a daughter or a wife ; or, as when we leave the street to enter a temple, something meditative, sweet, confidential, tender, and consoling, and such as we are not apt to experience elsewhere : that temple for me is in this land of the Bible ; and it seemed to me as if, in ascending the last hills which separated me from Nazareth, I were about to contemplate at its source that all-comprehensive and fruitful religion which has for nearly two thousand years been established, and is

* Tristram, "The Land of Israel."

establishing itself in the universe, and which has refreshed so many generations by its clear and vivifying waters." It is even so. Here dwelt "the Word made flesh"; He shone forth in all His glory on other hills, but He took His first lessons in sorrow and in the perfection of suffering here.

"Thrice for us the Word Incarnate high on holy hills was set ;
Once on Tabor, once on Calvary, and again on Olivet.
Once to shine and once to suffer, and once more as King of kings ;
With a merry noise ascending, borne by cherùbs on their wings."*

Here He lived,—the great, the holy, the wise, the tender, the strong, the Infinite,—from hence He departed with a few illiterate men to utter His affecting discourses, to be either a divine consolation or a confounding perplexity to all the ages following. From hence He went forth to conquer death and posterity.

This is the spirit in which we must seek the hallowed spots of the Holy Land ; but we must find first a Holy Land in our own souls, or we shall find no Holy Land there, as the poet has truly said.

"What seek I ? 'Tis *Gethsemane*,
The moonlight olive shade,
The garden of Gethsemane,
The scene of silent agony,
Where Jesus was betrayed.

* Quoted in Dr. Neall's "Commentary on the Psalms," vol. ii.

What seek I? It is *Calvary*,
Where Christ was crucified,
The cruel cross of Calvary,
The spot disowned of earth and sky,
Where God's Beloved died.

What seek I? 'Tis the *Sepulchre*,
Whose stone was rolled away,
The solitary Sepulchre
Bedewed at morn with tears and myrrh,
Where my dead Saviour lay.

What seek I? It is *Olivet*,
Where last His footsteps trod,
The fair familiar Olivet
That speaks of 'that same Jesus' yet,
Gone to the throne of God.

Yet all those scenes, so dread, so drear,
Seem distant, faint, and dim ;
Gethsemane is rapt in fear,
Forsaken Olivet looks sear,
And all are void of Him.

Then here, my God, I seek for Thee,—
Here in this heart of mine,
Here let the Cross and Garden be,
Thy death, Thy life, revealed in me ;
Heaven's mystery divine."

XX.

Bethany, the Village of the Palms.

“And He led them out as far as Bethany.”—LUKE xxiv. 50.

BETHANY is another spot which illustrates the tenderness of Jesus. I say the tenderness of Jesus, for His is a religion of tenderness. So we know His every action and all His words were the out-breathing of tenderness and love. I have heard some say, if they professed a religion at all, they would be Mahometans; I dare say, for that is exactly the religion for a hard, selfish, and cruel man. A little incident occurs in the journal of a well-known traveller. He came into one of the cities of the East, after a horrible Turkish massacre. The heart of the traveller was moved within him for a young widow; she was a lady of about twenty (that with us would represent a much more advanced period of life); her husband and parents had been murdered under circumstances of great barbarity; the murderers had promised

to spare her husband's life if she would produce all the jewels and ornaments she had concealed. She gave them instantly; they then told him he must prepare for death. "They suffered him," she said, "to lay his head on my bosom for a moment, and then they murdered him." They spared her, and she was living, inconsolable, with two Greek women. An air of settled melancholy had fixed itself on her countenance. She had only been married a few months; it had been a life, although in the East, of pure and holy love. She was capable of intense and devoted attachment; she longed for death,—it would not come. She was a woman, therefore, excluded from the mosque. She knew nothing of religion, she knew little of the Koran; but one day she took it up, and turned its pages to find that the prospect of meeting her murdered husband in paradise was denied to her, the Prophet having forbidden any woman to enter the same bowers of bliss. The promise of a separate heaven was lost on her, and she tossed the gold-illuminated copy of the Koran from her in disgust. How different to the teaching of the Lord of Life, who has the same words of immortality alike for the weeping sister and the weeping widow! Mahometanism is a religion for men of the world, who desire to retain in immortality the passions of time. The religion of Jesus is for hearts full of sorrow, and well acquainted with the grief of bereavement.

Well, here is the scene of the story of Karshish, an

Arab physician;* here "the Nazarene wrought the great cure"; that wonderful event happened here.

"The very God ! Think, Abib ; dost thou think ?
So the All-Great were the All-Loving too :
So thro' the thunder comes a human voice,
Saying, ' Oh heart ! I made a heart beat here !
Face, my hands fashioned thee in myself ;
Thou hast no power nor may'st conceive of mine,
But love I gave thee, with myself to love,
And thou must love me, who have died for thee.' "

The neighbourhood of Brighton is rather favourable, as I have often shown, for illustrating many of the scenes of the Holy Land ; it is not altogether unfavourable for illustrating the position of Bethany. It was in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off; but that distance must be a little increased or you will not get to Bethany. Substantially, however, that is about the distance. There are so many spots of interest in the Holy Land, so many villages, it would be quite a task of difficulty to say which is the most interesting ; and yet there can be few more interesting than this Bethany. A beautiful village, locked among the quiet hills, lying on the slope of the Mount of Olives. There are three ways to reach it, and each is so full of interest to us. One winds up the slight depression of the Mount of Olives, touches the village, which climbs up to the summit, and then winds down to the declivity. The second

* See the very startling and instructive poem of Robert Browning.

branches off above Gethsemane, strikes the south side of the village, and joins the former above Bethany; and the third strikes to the right, below Gethsemane, passes round the shoulder of the hill, and is the main road to Jericho. Take the first. Here is the road along which David fled from Absalom.* Surely such instances are not uninteresting; but we do not follow David on his way, we turn down from the mountain, the terraced fields, and fig orchards, and fall into a more frequented path; so we reach the little lonely mountain hamlet, and pass the low rocky ridge which screens Bethany from Mount Olivet. Wonderful are the transactions which have hung an undying interest round this mountain village home!

It was, it would seem, often the Saviour's earthly home. It is said, "He went from the city into Bethany, and He lodged there." An elevated site, shaded by the Mount of Olives, thickly surrounded by plantations of the fig (Bethphage, the House of Figs, is here), and this is Bethany, the House or Place of Dates—probably the wild honey on which John fed, for so the date was called.

Bethany, the House or Place of Dates, or of the Palm. It may be interesting to the reader to turn to the remarks of Hepworth Dixon, in which he very rudely seeks to set aside that etymology altogether, and fortifies his own rejection by some

* 2 *Salmuel* xv. 23-30, xvi. 1.

searching analysis from the lamented Emanuel Deutsch.* Impressed by the barrenness of the place when visiting it, he thought, Where are all the palms? So Dixon and Deutsch transform Bethany into Bethanyah, or the House of Dates, into the House of Misery. Perhaps the world will not see much reason to alter its old idea of the meaning of the name. Deutsch was a large scholar, but a rash and bold speculator. The wretchedness of many a village in the Holy Land is no proof of any ancient desolation; palms must have been abundant on a spot where they were taken and strewn in the way of the Saviour; and stern as its aspect may be now, no doubt it was bright and verdant and lovely then. And here, embosomed amidst the olive, almond, and pomegranate trees, stood the old seclusion of the sisters and their brother; here the quiet spirit of our Redeemer rested amidst cheerful love. Honoured and adored, here, perhaps, He had the few gracious intervals which broke the monotony of sorrow. We love to realize Him there; there He was a well-known friend; no want, methinks, of fragrant waters for the feet or for the face.

Here probably were some of those interludes of joy. It was not all mournful—not all a life of sorrows and of thorns. Had He not the pleasures of holy sympathy?—had He not the rich satisfaction of His own Divine sensibilities? The widow in the Treasury gave Him

* "Holy Land," chap. xx., Bethany and Note.

joy, and the family at Bethany gave Him joy.* And that memorable scene at the house of Simon the leper ; and the feast provided by Martha, who served, and who received the kind word of our Lord, not as it has been so often used. Martha, Martha, why will you provide so many things? and Mary has chosen the good part ; food perishes, but holy words never die. What anxious eyes were straining beyond those olive hills to see Him coming to the swift call which had been sent,—“Lord, he whom Thou lovest is sick.” What worlds it speaks, what nights, what days, what sympathy, what communion! Oh, when we cry in prayer never shall we transcend it: “He whom Thou lovest is sick.” At last He comes! Too late!—too late! No; let that teach us that He never comes too late if He come at all: and all was doubt and mistrust. What reproof: “Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.” Loved not this man? What a scene at the grave: the intense interest of the affectionate family, then the mighty moment at the mouth of the grave. “Lazarus! come forth!” And he came forth, a living form,—

The loved, the lost, the won,—
Won from the grave, corruption, and the worm.
And is not this the Son
Of God? they whispered ;
While the sisters poured
Their gratitude to Him, for they had known the Lord.

* Martineau.

And the village is called, and has ever since been called, Lazari.

Now here, on this road, was the place of the triumphal entry of the Saviour into Jerusalem (John xii. 12). Crowds streamed from the city; they cut down the branches of palm with which the village abounded; they met the crowds pouring from the village; the road was sought, they strewed the palm in His path, the multitudes unbound their garments and cast them in the road. They neared the great city of David; it owned him as the founder of its royalty. Then rose the shout, "Hosannah to the Son of David! Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord!" Crossing the hill of Olivet, the city burst into sight. There rises the Temple, on Moriah's brow, there rolls the brook Kedron, there are the shades and solitudes of Gethsemane. He reaches a spot well known—a rocky ledge just before the descent; it all burst upon Him in its beauty, its unbelieving impenitence and pride; all the future rose before Him. He burst into a passion of tears; "as He drew near to the city He wept over it." So He bade farewell to Bethany; the Man of Sorrows returned no more, He advanced to His crucifixion.

Yet once more; probably in His resurrection life more than once He visited Bethany. Then He blessed them; He lifted up His hands—action of intercession, for He was the High Priest now, and He was about to enter into the holiest of all. The blessing of the

Saviour and the Intercessor and the Sacrifice too. Such tenderness we can conceive in His tones, such majesty, and such power. He poured upon them some of His own happiness, for the human heart of the Redeemer must have been full; their natures were charged with celestial and most blessed energy by Him. This is blessedness; it is a drop of heaven in an earthen cup. Blessing is not an action wrought in dumb show upon us, but a transfusing power by which dark natures become light, and sinful natures holy: such is this blessing. "Blessed is the man whom Thou choosest, and causëst him to approach unto Thee!" Those whom Christ leads out He blesses with a knowledge of His presence—with sacred, certain, holy words.

And here we must terminate for the present our wanderings through the villages of the Holy Land,—dearest of all the spots on the earth to believing hearts. They are most of them now "turned into barrenness for the sins of those who dwelt therein"; but they are still rich in vitality and suggestion. The shadows of the people who passed through them; or lived in them, still linger along their deserted and desolate byeways; and still they retain a power to call up the lessons from the lives of patriarchs and prophets and seers, and the yet more simple people who thronged their fountains and their wells. For are there in the stories of the world more touching stories than those old Hebrew idylls? And amongst

these scenes, although man has ceased his mighty hymn, Nature perpetually resumes hers, and the voices of ancient revelation seem perpetually to resume their chant over the old-world spots and scenes; the air is filled with ancient memories and prophecies and histories and songs. Well says Lamartine: "How great is God! how infinite and deep must be the Source from which flows so much life and splendour and goodness! If there be so much to see, to admire, to surprise, and confound us in a single small nook of nature, how will it be when the veil of all worlds will be raised for us, and we shall be able to contemplate the whole of the stupendous work in its infinity? It is impossible to see and ponder without being overpowered by the internal evidence in which is reflected the idea of God. All nature is strewn with fragments of the splendid mirror in which God is depicted." Thus the past survives.

The Rabbis have a grand, wild legend in one of their Talmuds, that not one stone of the ancient building of the old Temple has been thrown down, but prophets and angels have strewn over it a pall or shroud of dust and ruins, to conceal it from the sight of the wicked; and within its subterranean and consecrated shadows are the ark, and the tables of the law, and the rod of Moses, and the golden pot of manna; there is the candlestick, and the tables of the shewbread; and all the sacred vessels are there; and there the holy prophet Elias daily offers sacri-

rice within its spectral walls, because the very earth itself cannot exist without sacrifice. But, by-and-by, the Lord, says the legend, shall turn again the captivity of Zion, and then all the stones of the Temple will be found in their old position, and the Holy of Holies shall be restored to its former glory; then God will unite in one holy hill the sternness of Sinai and the beauty of Tabor and the excellency of Carmel, and place upon them the New Temple, which shall never be destroyed. Thither Messiah will bring the crown of the house of David, and from thence will He restore the kingdom to Israel; and then all the silver and the gold and the precious stones which are at the bottom of the sea, and which have been lost since the creation of the world, will be thrown up along its shores. And the Temple will be of silver and gold and jewels. And the Jews will return from exile, to celebrate the jubilee with the Messiah, and regain their ancient possessions.* Truly a wild and wonderful tradition; and very true and wonderful it is that in the ruin of all that constituted the sensible reality of the Hebrew hagiocracy, the idea still abides; the spirit of its scenery and its service is everywhere, it has gone out into all the earth, and to the ends of the world. And the shades of the past, which still attract the traveller to lone Syrian villages, seem to prophesy a restoration and a glory yet to come.

* Pierrotti, "Customs and Traditions of Palestine."

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